



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>





600056687





THE LEES OF BLENDON HALL.

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“ALICE WENTWORTH,”

ETC., ETC.

“Ἐπειτα ποίας ἡμέρας δοκεῖς μ’ ἄγειν,
ὅταν θρόνοις, Αἰγισθὸν ἐνθακοῦντ’ ἰδῶ
τοῖσιν πατράσιν.”

Electra of Sophocles, line 266.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
SUCCESSORS TO HENRY COLBURN,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1859.

The right of Translation is reserved.

249. x. 49.

TH

LONDON:
PRINTED BY R. BORN, GLOUCESTER STREET,
REGENT'S PARK.



I

b

n

f

v

THE LEES OF BLENDON HALL,

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

CHAPTER I.

I HAD been doubtful as to how I should be able to get on when quite alone with my sister-in-law; not that I had had any fear of strife arising between us; but I was uncertain if I should—when reduced to her single society and that of the children—find in her sufficient companionship to guard me against a relapse into that habit of melancholy pondering over past scenes, which had so paralysed me

the year before, and into which I had been disposed to fall back during the latter part of our stay at Stonecliffe.

I became gradually aware, however, that Christine had "much more in her," as it is called, than I had supposed; for her total absence of all wish to put forward her own opinions, and her calm power of yielding attentive interest to the conversation of others, without any inclination to take part in it uncalled for, had deceived me into thinking her incapable of forming, or following, any views wider or deeper than those needed to regulate her daily practical routine.

This I discovered to be by no means the case; for though her pursuits had been always different to mine, and her understanding developed under quite opposite influences, she had no stiff or narrow prejudices inspiring her with scorn or dis-

trust of natures different to her own; and in the more frequent interchange of ideas between us which now habitually occurred, I learnt that if she was without some kinds of knowledge that I possessed, she had some others from which my manner of life had debarred me.

She had, for three or four years of hers, been a good deal in the world; not the London world, but the mixed world of English travellers and residents abroad, with its sprinkling of "natives," which a sojourn in Switzerland and Italy, from fifteen or sixteen till twenty, had thrown her among; so that, as she did not lack the power of observing either things or persons, she was able, though no dealer in anecdotes, often to interest and entertain me by the accounts of much that was, in its details, new to me.

I saw that she thought me singular in

4 THE LEES OF BLENDON HALL.

some points; but she was so thoroughly kind, so willing to lay whatever she could not completely approve to my great misfortune in not having had such a mother as hers had been, that I never suffered a moment during my intercourse with her from the feeling of being misunderstood to my disadvantage; and when we—as it sometimes befell—talked *out* our differences of view and feeling on any subject, her excessive candour and gentle courtesy rendered it possible for us occasionally to go to the bottom of some knotty points, without either being led into those personalities which are in general the great bar to discussion of over-interesting subjects between those who mean to continue friends.

The life we led at Tynteford was most retired, partly owing to the situation of the place, and partly owing to the humble footing on which our establishment was set up.

There were, nevertheless, human beings around who furnished us, every now and then, with fresh subjects of talk, which, if not remarkably lively, were at all events different from what we should ourselves have originated, and so far afforded a variety to our thoughts and feelings.

Nor were these human beings solely of the kind with whom our dealings were simply matters of business or charity, though neither the number nor nature of the households of the better class immediately about us were such as to provide us with much of what is commonly called society.

The clergyman and his wife were elderly people, whose only son was in India, and their nephew, who acted as curate to his uncle, was married to an unpretending, but shy and weak-spirited little woman, with whom Christine got on well, as she did with everyone, but who was too

much occupied at home to have any great time or interest to spare for acquaintances.

Godfrey's crony, the old half-pay naval officer, who had seen the world in his day—as well as been round it—talked agreeably and listened with interest on many subjects; but his health was too indifferent for him to be much of a visitor—especially as winter came on—or even for him to be always visible in the sitting-room at his brother's when we called at the Rectory; and when I have mentioned this family, and that of a late rector's widow who had an invalid daughter and a son in Australia, I think I have summed up everything that could claim the denomination of gentry in Tynteford, or within a walk of it, except it were a couple of elderly maiden sisters, who inhabited a remarkably pretty cottage just beyond the village, where their charity and benevolence

—though they were by no means wealthy—had become proverbial.

There were farmers in the district, more or less well off; but it was not till you got farther away by some miles that anything of what goes by the name of a “neighbourhood” began to exist; which “neighbourhood,” besides being a good deal scattered, consisted mainly, as if through a kind of fate affecting that line of country, of old and childless couples, with a sprinkling of houses where there were indeed little children, but no “young people.”

The inhabitants of these—mostly handsome and well-kept—country seats had, with few exceptions, already called on my brother and his wife when I arrived at Tynteford, and before the end of summer Godfrey had, by degrees, “killed them all off,” as he called it, by driving Christine over in the pony-carriage on fine days to return their visits.

But winter weather was not favourable for the advancement of intimacy between us and these distant "magnates" of the land; more especially as our only vehicle was the open pony-chair above mentioned. Added to which Godfrey's departure cut short those meetings on certain out-posts of neutral ground between him and the gentlemen of the vicinity, which had, I suppose, now and then reminded their families that there were people of the name of Lee at Tynteford, too far off to ask to dinner, but not beyond the beat within which an invitation to an archery party might be sent, or a visit paid when others were due in the same direction.

Still, to all such civilities as were paid her, Christine invariably responded with an easy readiness, which somewhat surprised me in a person who certainly did not look to society either as a refuge from weariness at

home, or as a field for triumphs of vanity of any sort; but I had not till now, except it were in Hugh Wyndham, come across that disposition of which sociability, in its literal sense, is a naturally component part, distinct from any other aim and end than the pleasure afforded by kindly intercourse with those who give token of sympathy, or even courteous interest. This nature of hers was so winning, that I could not be astonished at its earning her golden opinions among all those who had an opportunity of experiencing the genuine good-will, far removed from officiousness, with which she took part in the concerns, little and great, of those with whom she was thrown; and as it thus naturally befell that the persons who saw her most often were most pleased with her, it followed that she was very much noticed, as was I (for her sake, originally), by two ladies, an exceedingly agreeable

mother and daughter, who, having that year come to occupy a property, considerably nearer to Tynteford than any of the other abodes of the regular county gentry, found Mrs. Lee more within the reach of their usual drives, than did most of the "Dames Châtelaines" farther inward in what was looked on as being, by courtesy, our neighbourhood.

Mrs. Hedworth, the mother, had been pretty, and was still, at past fifty, most agreeable in appearance and manner, in which latter particular she had decidedly the advantage over her handsome, but not always very accessible daughter, who, no longer in the first bloom of youth, but a remarkably fine woman both in face and person, was apt to vary her demeanour according to her likes or dislikes, and was, therefore, designated by some as the "proud and airified," by others, as "the frank and off-hand" Miss Hedworth.

Frank and off-hand to me and to Christine she always was, for I believe she really liked us; but I saw enough of her deportment towards others—and those far from insignificant members of their county acquaintance—to convince me that the less favourable epithets bestowed on her were no ways undeserved. That, however, was no affair of ours; she and her mother had travelled a good deal, were well informed, ready in speech, frequent in their calls, and always visibly pleased to welcome us and the boys to early dinner in winter, to tea as spring advanced, whenever it suited Christine (and her pony) to perform the journey of three or four miles which divided their dwelling from ours.

Dora Hedworth and I did not, however, become friends in the full sense of the word, though our acquaintance grew to considerable intimacy. She was, at least,

ten years older than I, and I should have felt it presuming to have made any farther advance than was justified by what she appeared to wish, and I soon saw that, notwithstanding the cheerful freedom with which she would, to a certain point, discuss all subjects, literary, social, or even local, there was beneath the surface a layer of reserve, proof against all such attempts to penetrate it, as could be ventured on by one who feared or scrupled to offend.

Whether she were really happy in her position, or only desirous out of pride to appear so; whether she were really interested in the pursuits she had taken up since her mother's establishment in their present abode, or had simply had recourse to them to get rid of heavy hours, and to fulfil what might be expected from her, I could never determine, nor could Chris-

tine ; for a slight circumstance would one day seem to prove the former state of things, while something would occur the next, indicating the latter hypothesis.

Of course there was much wondering among our mutual acquaintances as to how and why it could be that Miss Hedworth, "with all her advantages," was not married, and many conjectural reasons of sentiment, ambition, interest, and vanity were assigned as possibly solving the problem, though I do not believe that one of those brought forward was founded on any actual knowledge. I did not myself see why she should not be satisfied with her condition as it was ; for she evidently returned her mother's tenderness with grateful warmth, possessed her share of authority in the house, and enjoyed besides, in some respects, even a greater amount of freedom than most married women.

This opinion I expressed one day to Christine, as we were driving home from the Hedworths'; and she observed, in return, "that there was indeed no actual reason or proof against Dora's being as contented as I thought she had cause to be, but that her own impression about her was different; and that she herself considered it always a pity when a woman, who probably might fill a definite position well, either wasted her best years in pastimes to which she was at heart indifferent, or forced herself into employments which she pursued with only a factitious interest."

I was much disposed to view my own sex as capable of a good deal more independence of existence and action than Christine could allow to be either natural, safe, or possible; and I thought at first that her opinions were only grounded on sentimental notions, illustrated by similes drawn from

the elm and vine, &c. ; but I found, as our conversation proceeded, that she had more to say for her impressions (in their general bearings at least) than I had expected. She plainly said that she held the estate of marriage to be nearly as necessary a condition of the calling forth of a woman's qualities of heart and mind after early youth, as a profession is to the advantageous development of a man's character ; and, while she yielded the sincerest respect and admiration to the often unappreciated merit of those women who, fated by Heaven to a single lot, exercise in all humility the merits best tested by their condition, she as sincerely deprecated the folly and ignorance of their own natures, which induced others, through romance, over-niceness, vanity, or rash ambition, so to act as to cut off their chance of having a sphere to move in, which offers a definite position and definite duties.

"For," said she, "if it is often difficult to be as good as one should be, when one does feel exactly what one ought to do, and why, how much more when one is really uncertain of the bounds of one's place, or of the degree in which one's influence or example signifies!"

"But," answered I, "whichever position may be, in fact, most favourable to womanly perfection, those that have no power of choice must even try to be 'as good as they can' in the inferior one."

"Of course," returned she; "only you, for one, Alswitha, can't fail to have that power. Oh, don't shake your head! I know you saw no one at your mother's, so that part of your life goes for nothing."

"I did see but few people, young or old, it is true; but I was not actually invisible, and I saw quite as many as some women ever do see before their mar-

riage, yet no man ever showed me a preference."

"*No* man? Alswitha!" asked my sister-in-law, earnestly.

"No man," repeated I.

"Of course I must believe you, returned she, after a pause; "but when I look at you," added she, fixing her eyes on me, "it is difficult—difficult, I mean, to understand how it could be."

I felt myself blush from head to foot, partly with pleasure at exciting such disinterested admiration, partly with a sense of humiliation, at guessing that Christine probably attributed my lack of lovers to an indifference I could not boast of; and, as this feeling prevented my being able to devise any answer at the moment, my sister-in-law, too kind and too well bred to push an uncommunicative friend with questions, pursued the subject no farther. Neither did she re-

cur to the topic, even incidentally, till several weeks afterwards, when as something was passing about the extremely unnoticed life that *may* be led in London, even by those who inhabit its most fashionable quarters, she observed :—

“That she supposed *I* was an instance of that. For,” continued she, “from what you and Godfrey have told me, it would seem no one was ever acquainted with you but that young Mr. Wyndham.”

I replied “that it was very true;” but, feeling the subject a dangerous one, I gave no handle to Christine for following it up, even supposing such to have been her intention; and she and I were again a long time without coming upon the ticklish question of “how far women have their fate in their own power?” though we not unfrequently discussed what brought us near upon the verge of it; and, though I suspect

she was, in her secret soul, eager to ascertain whether my past life had, or had not, really been the blank it was assumed to be.

CHAPTER II.

WEEKS and months passed on with little more change in our daily habits and employments than what was wrought by the lengthening of the days, by the gradual softening and brightening of the weather, and—as spring advanced—by the renewed beauty of the face of Nature.

I was again able to have recourse to my old occupation of sketching, and, on most fine mornings, after having given little Philip the short lesson in geography, which invariably ended with a request to

be shown on the globe "where papa was?" I took my pupil out with me into one of the neighbouring lanes, and there set to work drawing whatever sheds, stiles, stumps of trees, and ivy-spread cottages I thought most likely to "get my hand in" again; while my companion was allowed to scamper about right and left, provided he never went beyond certain boundary lines, and provided also that he came back to my side every now and then, to "see if Aunt Alswitha wanted anything."

We could also venture on longer drives owing to the increase of daylight; and the state of the cross-roads and paths had improved so much towards the end of April, that Miss Hedworth, who commonly eschewed all such exercise as involved exposure to mud and lifting up of garments, more than once contrived to reach on foot a half-way point between our respective dwellings, where

I met her, and where we proceeded to try our skill in imitating Nature rather more ambitiously than I, at least, had yet dared to attempt.

These artistic assignations did not, however, occur often, as my new friend was not remarkable for perseverance, and a very slight inconvenience as regarded access, a very small imperfection of temperature as regarded weather, would at any time lead her to give up a sketching plan she had herself proposed, and dilated on rather enthusiastically, while under favourable influences of air, sky, and spirits.

"You may see," would Christine observe, "that Dora Hedworth has no real love for this kind of employment; she is getting tired of it, as she has got tired of all else, poor thing!—and I should not wonder if she never touched a pencil again."

This did not prove *literally* the case;

though Dora's zeal did, indeed, so far relax that our meetings for artistic purposes, when they took place, came to be, on her part, rather opportunities for desultory talk and desultory rambles, than for what she professed to seek, namely "studies for foregrounds;" but *I* had no objection either to listen to her, or to saunter with her, so found equal pleasure, if not equal improvement, in complying with her fancies, in whatever direction, idle or industrious, they happened to lead her.

Christine and I had by this time been cheered by the arrival of more than one letter from Godfrey. Not having seen any of his written from sea, I could not judge whether there was any difference in their tone from those of former days; but my sister-in-law observed, that she hardly knew whether to be pleased or vexed to notice that they breathed something less of perfect

satisfaction with his present position, something more of regret for home and impatience to return, than she had been used to trace in his communications under similar circumstances.

Was that difference caused by a change mere time had made in his spirits?—or could it be connected with a newly-awakened interest, stronger than the attraction to his own fireside, which drew him towards England by the more than magnetic influence of an aim to be accomplished, a desire to be gratified, for the attainment whereof his heart beat more eagerly than for the sight of wife or child?

I knew not, and vainly lost myself in conjectures, which I might not impart to any, and from the involuntary forming of which I was glad to divert my mind, making as much room in it as I could for the interests and feelings of those around me, whether in

our household, or among the persons I met casually.

I therefore tried to listen to Mrs. Hedworth with more sympathy than I actually experienced, while she calculated the chances for and against shortly receiving a visit from her son, Captain Hedworth of the —th Hussars, and did my best to hide from Dora my suspicion that the young officer (who was her junior by three or four years), might not improbably find London in the beginning of May too pleasant to allow of its being “in his power” to visit the country, when it had no other attraction than its vernal beauty, and the presence of his parent and sister.

It did, however, prove to be “in his power,” and I believe I must have wronged him in concluding him inaccessible to affectionate feeling and simple pleasures, for I must say he seemed good-hearted and amiable, not perhaps quite

so easy to please as Hugh Wyndham, but in the main happy-tempered and attached to his family, as well as agreeable and perfectly unaffected in manners.

His mother and sister were, notwithstanding, evidently anxious not to test the contentedness of his disposition too severely, for they exerted themselves, more than was quite consistent with their frequent observations on "dear Percy's very quiet tastes," to add to the gratification their own company might afford him, whatever farther enlivenment to his home visit might be obtained through such social amusement as was within their reach.

I suppose they thought Christine and me capable, in our degree, of contributing to the desired end ; for, though the house at Birkstone was not, in the opinion of its very luxurious inmates, large enough to accommodate many guests, they twice over insisted on

our sleeping there, when, as one or two other friends were doing the same, it entailed a good deal of management, and a certain amount of what was, for them, close packing.

It happened — fortunately for Dora's visible wish to provide her brother with society in that "pleasant month of May" (which is, in the country, the "deadest" in the whole year for everything except fly-fishing)—that chance had at that moment brought a few young people into several of the neighbouring houses.

Old Sir William Fiennes had with him his wife's nephew and two nieces; the Wortleys the young cousin, who failing other heirs, was one day to inherit their property; and the Honeywoods, who were generally famous for never having any visitors at all, had opened their doors to an elderly friend and her two sons, both evidently

addicted to that same sport of fly-fishing.

It was probably a great relief to these various birds of passage, (who, except the fly-fishers, had in all likelihood, expected nothing but dulness in visits paid out of duty to elderly relations,) to find that the family at Birkstone was eager to bring together every young person they could muster, to enliven dinner-parties and picnics, which last were always contrived to take place at some spot near enough to us to be within the powers of our pony. It happened besides, more than once, that their little carriage called to convey me in the morning to Birkstone, where I was picked up by Christine in hers, about sunset; and, in short, matters were so arranged, that we saw something of them and a little of their other acquaintances, almost daily during Captain Hedworth's stay.

He, I must confess, returned with interest all the welcome and courtesy shown to him; he was besides (though less handsome than Dora) good-looking as well as pleasant mannered, and I thought, on the whole, that his sojourn with his family produced a very agreeable variety in our ordinary mode of existence; not the less so, perhaps, from its affording me, indirectly, through the parties made up to meet him, either at dinner or for morning excursions, what might be called a sort of adventitious glimpse of more general society.

I was not "enraptured" by it; possibly because, as Dora Hedworth always averred, "nothing ever could be lively in such a dull neighbourhood;" but more probably because, though such assemblies were as new to me as to Lady Fiennes's pretty little niece of seventeen, I was in fact nearly twenty-two, old of my age, and

disenchanted with life. Entertaining or not, however, I was pleased to have even thus much sight of what I had hitherto lived shut out from, and glad, too, to talk it over with Miss Hedworth and Christine, though I cannot say that I had thought it delightful enough to find it any terrible loss, when our comparatively gay fortnight was brought to a close, by the departure of the guest whose presence had occasioned this temporary change. I felt sorry for Dora, who was losing the company of a brother she was both fond and proud of; and I said so to Christine the evening before his departure for London, while we lingered together outside the gate of our little garden, watching the brother and sister as they disappeared down the lane after calling on us.

“So am I,” returned she, “extremely

sorry for her. I am sure she feels his going terribly ; but I hardly thought you supposed her to mind it so much."

"She cannot but mind it," replied I, "for she is evidently much attached to him, and I don't wonder at it ; don't *you* think him agreeable?" added I, surprised at a sort of puzzled expression that came over her face as I spoke. "I should have thought you would have liked him exceedingly, Christine!"

"And so I do," she replied ; "but if you also like him," continued she, hesitatingly, "it is perhaps the less to be wondered at if—" she stopped short, till on my looking inquiringly at her, she resumed her speech by saying "she thought she saw now, how it was that no one, even among those who *had* seen me in my old home, had ever particularly attended to me."

“For,” proceeded she, “though several people at Mrs. Hedworth’s told me how handsome and clever they considered you, I feel sure no man among them would ever have dreamt of showing you he thought so; since, with your manner, it is only a goose or a coxcomb who would venture on it.”

“It’s unfortunate for me to be so restricted in my choice, for I am not partial to either,” replied I.

“You know I don’t mean that, Alswitha!” cried she, “but—but—the truth is, it is very difficult to explain what I *do* mean, for I don’t want you to think I should like to see you a flirt; but still,—”

She again hesitated, and I took advantage of her pause to inquire “whether she meant that I had not talked enough to Captain Hedworth, for instance? Be-

cause I thought I had, and should be very sorry to think I had been wanting in courtesy."

"Yes, you talked, and agreeably too; you are neither silent nor airified in company; you have a great deal more manner, indeed, than I should have expected from one who had been so secluded, but still—still—"

She repeated the words anew without seeming able to get farther, and I asked her smiling, "whether she thought it would have been my duty to have echoed Dora's endeavours to extract from her brother (as he was taking leave of us) a promise of coming back to Birkstone in August? If he cares to come to his mother's this summer, he is quite sufficiently authorized so to do without any intervention of mine! Do you really consider that I ought to have helped to press him?"

34 THE LEES OF BLENDON HALL.

"Not exactly," said Christine, "though I am not sure Dora didn't wish you to take your part in the entreaty; but you looked so thoroughly as if you didn't care!"

"Well, no more I did!"

Christine could not help laughing at what she called my downrightness, and scrupled, when pushed, to advise my affecting an interest I did not feel; "only," proceeded she, "if you want to know precisely what it is I have been remarking in you, I can just indicate what I feel by saying, that had I not known who you were at that party given to the Wortleys, on that afternoon we went with the Fienneses to Thornley Abbey, I should have taken you to be a married woman, or, if I had missed the ring on her finger, I should have settled that you were, or considered yourself, so solemnly engaged as to be all but married."

I felt that what my kind sister-in-law meant, might, if concisely put, be expressed by the words "too self-possessed," which phrase I was very near offering her as an expletive; but, not wishing to go deep, either with her or myself, into the grounds of that self-possession, which had its root in an indifference which might be thought to need explanation, I hastened to get rid of the subject by making some commonplace remarks on "the difficulty of hitting that precise shade of manner, easy without being familiar, soft without betraying consciousness," which would be, as I was ready to agree with Christine, the perfection of demeanour for one of my age and position.

CHAPTER III.

I HAD, earlier in the year, or rather at the close of the preceding one, received an invitation from the Halseys; but the visit had been proposed to me so immediately upon Godfrey's departure, that I could not then bear to leave Christine alone, at a season of the year, too, when there was so little in the outer world around her, to cheer or divert the spirits. I had, therefore, withstood all her kind entreaties "not to think of her, but to go and pay a visit which she knew had been

talked of so often, and which, she was sure, would do me all the good in the world."

I did my best to convince her that I was making no sacrifice; but I could not help her bestowing very undue praise on my supposed self-denial, for it was not in my power to tell her how much the discoveries at Blendon had cooled my long-cherished wish to be allowed to visit my relations; since, with that terrible secret of my father's murder on my mind, I did not feel as if I could talk easily and naturally to Mr. Halsey, or to Katharine, on any subject connected with our family affairs.

When, however, a second invitation reached me in May, just after our "gay fortnight" had come to an end, and I was again pressed to spend some weeks with the Halseys (who were not, this year,

going to London), I could neither feel nor affect any scruples at quitting Christine in fine weather, improved spirits, and frequent intercourse with the Hedworths; nor would I, for the world, have given my kind cousins the slightest notion that I valued their hospitality the less from having it in my power to profit by it. I therefore made up my mind to go, and was getting, as I began my preparations, to look forward with more satisfaction to my visit, when I received from Katharine Halsey tidings of the dangerous illness of one of her married sisters, to attend whom both she and her parents were starting instantly for the north of England, and consequently, "must defer the pleasure of seeing me till some happier time."

Christine was vexed on my account; far more than, on grounds affecting myself, I could even pretend to be; and I

saw she was astonished, not to say puzzled, by my equanimity; but she was not given to prying into the secrets of the heart, nor to probing the mind with questions; so contented herself with a few observations on "the ill-luck that seemed always to hinder my going near people who were evidently so desirous to see more of me," while I quietly ordered my boxes to be unpacked, and wished I might be one day less haunted, less beset by the knowledge, the remembrances, which now caused me to feel, as it were, relieved at escaping, for the present, from this once eagerly longed-for visit!

I heard from Katharine several times during the fluctuations of her sister's illness, concerning which the ever sympathizing Christine was always such an anxious inquirer, that I generally read out the bulletins to her as they came; but

one morning, while I was doing so, I perceived, as I lifted my eyes a moment from my letter, that my sister-in-law was no longer listening, so intent was she on a corner of the newspaper. My first fear was that she had seen some disastrous report concerning Godfrey's ship; but I was soon undeceived, when she asked me hastily if young Mr. Wyndham's name were Hugh? and if his regiment were the —th?

“Good Heavens!” cried I, “what has happened to him?”

“He has lost his wife,” said she, “if it be he, as I conclude it must, and if *her* name were Rosa.”

I snatched the paper, in which I indeed saw, that Rosa Wyndham, together with her infant child, had died within the year after her marriage; and, as the image of Hugh, in sorrow, and at a distance from his family and country, rose upon my mind,

the words, "Oh, that I could be with him!" escaped my lips before I was aware.

"You seem to feel for him as for a brother," said my sister-in-law, quite innocently.

"Well, Christine, and so I do!" answered I, gathering some self-command. "He stood to me in the place of my real, but absent brother, during the whole time of my acquaintance with him. He was a true and kind friend, helping and advising me for good whenever I needed it, yet never preaching nor seeming to think himself better than other people."

"He must be very amiable," observed Christine, "very unlike what I have understood his brother to be."

"Oh, *so* unlike!" exclaimed I.

"Did you know *her*?" asked my sister-in-law.

"No, I only once saw her. Hugh showed her to me at the Opera; she was a lovely creature; and those two seemed so happy together!"

Tears overflowed my eyes, and it was with sincere grief and compassion that I bewailed that shipwreck of earthly bliss, that parting for ever, as regards this world, of those whom love had bound so tenderly. The feeling was single and unmingled; more so, possibly, than it would have been had Godfrey and I never taken that drive to Blendon Hall; for the discoveries then and there made had, in a moment, raised such a new wall of separation between me and whatever was of Wyndham blood, that the tidings of Hugh's freedom from the band that linked him to another did not now affect me (consciously to myself at least) in that personal manner which I should have probably ex-

perienced, had I heard of Rosa's death before we went to Stonecliffe. I was grieved for Hugh; doubly grieved not to be able even to attempt consoling him (for it somehow never occurred to me at first that I could write); and it was with a somewhat gratified surprise that I heard Christine say, as if my doing so were a matter of course:—

“Do you know his direction?—or will you just address your letter to his regiment's quarters?”

There was, in fact, no reason why I should abstain from doing that to which my heart prompted me, and which was rendered the more easy by the entire absence of any feeling or hope under those I wished to convey; so, hastily taking pen in hand, I found at once the words of sympathy wherewith to show my friend how I compassionated his bereavement, how

I sorrowed for his sorrow. I sought to do no more, and my lines were few; for it was not my place to endeavour after giving counsel or comfort; I only prayed earnestly that the latter might be granted him from on high, and expressed that prayer as I should have done had he been Godfrey. I enclosed the letter to Mrs. Wroughton, whose husband would, I knew, obtain means of forwarding it to its destination; and thus, as I sat alone with Christine, unable for awhile to settle to any employment, I presently found myself involuntarily dilating to her on Hugh Wyndham's character and whole history, the particulars of his first acquaintance and intimacy with me—in short, everything I knew connected with him, except the amount and nature of the attachment with which he had inspired me, and the *precise* circumstances of the quarrel between him and

those in authority over me. I was the more easily led into this degree of confidential talk, by perceiving that my sister-in-law, though doating on a love-story, was so single-minded, and unsuspicious of the possibility of my having been over fascinated by one whom I knew all along to be bound to another, that I ran no risk of giving rise to any deeper conjectures in her brain, even when I entered with most details on the subject of Hugh's good and amiable qualities.

"What a loss it must have been to you," said she, "when he was forced into a quarrel with that horrid brother of his!" And the interest she showed was so strong, and so naturally expressed, yet so devoid of all investigating curiosity, that, notwithstanding the existence of particulars which I necessarily kept to myself, that day made me feel on more

thoroughly sisterly terms with Christine, than the preceding ten months had done. It is true that I never felt tempted, even for a moment, to break my promise of silence to Godfrey, and still less to the breach of that I had made to my own soul, of never humiliating myself by un-compelled confessions ; but the footing we lived on became, nevertheless, so confidential, that when, about a month later, I received the acknowledgment of my letter, I gave it her the moment I had looked through its contents, which ran as follows :—

“It was like your kindness, dear Alswitha, to write to me as you have done ; and I should be most ungrateful if I allowed myself any excuse for delaying longer to thank such a friend for her sympathy. Several of my own relations, and of poor Rosa’s, have shown

their friendly feeling in letters meant to soothe the affliction that has been decreed me ; but none save yours has fully entered into the sorrow which few hearts, as yet untried by a similar loss, are tender enough to conceive. You are so affectionate-minded as to guess at what you can never have felt—may never, I trust, have cause to feel!—and therefore it is that I have not the difficulty in answering you, that oppresses me in attempting to acknowledge the intended kindness of others. You and I have talked so often and so openly together of all our thoughts and feelings, that, although you did not know Rosa, you knew more what she was to me than many of those who—one would think—should be better able to measure the lonely wretchedness of one from whom she is thus suddenly snatched away. With my vanished happiness, dear

girl, vanish many castles I had never entirely left off building ; for ever since your leaving your mother's, we often talked over the chances for and against your visiting us some day ; and, the last time *she* and I were out together, we agreed that I should write and ask Wroughton where you were. Considering what that 'where' now is, there appears little likelihood of our meeting ; but, nevertheless, I feel convinced that some day, sooner or later, meet we shall, till which time I only beg you, dearest Alswitha, to continue as kind a friend as you have been both in presence and in absence, to your grateful and affectionate,

“HUGH WYNDHAM.”

“Well, dear,” said Christine, as she returned me the letter, “since he was, at all events to lose this poor little wife of his,

and you were forced to leave your mother's house, which is always a sad thing, however unavoidable, I do think, in spite of Godfrey's prejudices, that it was a pity that French girl told you what, most likely, prevented your marrying him; for, I confess, I don't see how you could have done better, he seems *so* amiable!"

"Yes," replied I, with a self-possession for which I afterwards wondered at myself, "he *is* most amiable;—but he is a Wyndham, and I am a Lee, which puts him out of the question."

"If you feel it so, of course it does," said Christine.

And, with the scenes of Blendon Hall full in my memory, I did so feel it.

CHAPTER IV.

MY removal to my brother's house did not leave me absolutely without tidings of my former home, for Mrs. Wroughton, with whom I kept up a constant correspondence, still called now and then in Eaton Square, and was always courteously received by my mother.

She never mentioned my name, Mrs. Wroughton said, nor had she ever, even in the most indirect manner, uttered anything that bordered upon an inquiry respecting me.

But she was much altered, and Mr. Wyndham, as report said (for my friend had not seen him herself), had aged considerably in appearance during the last year.

I could well imagine that, if their life had been wretched formerly, it was likely to be more wretched now; and that *he*, at least, must be existing in constant dread and alarm of what had indeed befallen, namely, that my reminiscences, when enlightened and assisted by my brother's, might possibly bring us to something more than a conjecture of his hidden crime.

I learnt also from Mrs. Wroughton, that Hugh was travelling about in some out-of-the-way place (in Styria, she thought her husband had said) with a young Glynne, one of poor Rosa's brothers; and I learnt from her, besides, a flying report (which, if not positively true at the time, proved at least prophetic), that Dora Hedworth's brother was

engaged to Mary Lethbridge, the elder of those two nieces of Lady Fiennes's, who had formed part of the company gathered together to meet him in May.

It followed, therefore, that he did *not* appear among us again in August, and that Dora, disappointed at losing his visit, and doubtful whether she should or should not be pleased with her sister-in-law on farther acquaintance, got so far the better of her reserve as to speak to me of her anxiety on the subject.

I recollected my own feelings when I received Godfrey's letter announcing his marriage; but, while I sympathised heartily with her doubts and fears, the nearer approach to confidential intimacy brought about by these conversations, afforded me so much insight into her character, as to incline me to believe, with Christine, that, however agreeable the result was to us

in making her our near neighbour, Dora Hedworth had made a mistake for herself in choosing to lead a single life.

She was not communicative enough for me to learn what her history had precisely been; but I am sure that our mutual acquaintance were right in asserting that she had refused many, apparently, suitable offers; and I suspect they were also correct in their belief that these refusals had sprung from a mixture of coldness and fastidiousness, and not from any one unfortunate preference thwarted by her parents.

However it all might have been, it was a plain case to me that she was in danger of becoming discontented, and that the sort of life which was bringing calmness to my vexed spirit, fretted hers, through its monotony, into a constant desire for change.

There certainly was very little to diversify or mark the days as they passed at Tynte-

ford; but the summer, as it glided by, had brought me a note of time in the shape of my twenty-second birth-day; and when I recollected my preceding one, I could hardly believe I was the same creature.

To be merry and light-hearted was not my nature; at least I had never been so except when surrounded with a crowd of young companions in good Madame Le Gallois' school, and again, perhaps, during those carelessly happy six weeks that Hugh Wyndham spent at Bampton Chase. But, if not disposed to exuberant liveliness, I was so conscious of having thrown aside the heavy burden of misery which had once weighed me down, that neither the discoveries made at Blendon, nor the fear of the storms which might one day burst upon me and all connected with me, in consequence of those discoveries, could prevent

my looking back on my past wretchedness with thankfulness for present peace.

And peacefully time rolled on for me during that autumn and winter, in the course of which I began to add a daily lesson in French to Philip's geographical studies; which event, and that of our going, at last, to spend a week with Christine's aunt, Mrs. Damer, were about the only things that could be called "changes" in our way of life.

My visit to the Halseys never took place; for, though their daughter recovered, her health remained so shattered that a winter in England was thought unsafe for her, and her parents and sister accompanied her abroad as soon as she was well enough to travel.

We heard from Godfrey now and then; as often as the chances of communication with distant stations permitted; and Christine was

for ever calculating the probabilities of his cruise being shortened or prolonged, according to certain vicissitudes of politics, &c., in which she took just so much interest as concerned their influence on her husband's earlier or later return.

I knew not myself what to wish! for, while keenly desirous, both for my own and Christine's sake, of again enjoying my brother's presence, there were reasons why I could have greatly preferred his absence from England till such a period as that death and other changes should have rendered the task he had set himself so difficult as to verge on an impossibility; and I always tried to turn away my thoughts from that which I could in no degree influence for success or failure, but on which my mind hung with painful interest whenever there was any break in the daily occupations which filled up our lives at Tynteford.

It seemed a great loss to Christine and me that spring, when the Hedworths, after many doubts and hesitations, determined on spending two months in London, for which place they started about the second week in May; and we missed them and their sympathizing kindness the more, when, just as they had left Birkstone, we began to be assailed by a whole host of troubles and difficulties respecting our abode, which Godfrey had taken for two years certain, with the option, as he understood, of retaining it for two years longer.

But it had not been so understood by Mr. Copsley our landlord, who, as we now discovered, wished to occupy his house himself; and, as it proved on examination that there was something ambiguous in the terms of the agreement, and that Christine had no security of having law on her side, she was fain to submit to a compromise.

The compromise was, that if Christine would consent to vacate the house by the end of June, and allow Mr. Copsley the use of it for the next three months, he would, on his part, consent to retain Captain Lee as his tenant for the next two years, making, of course, the deduction of that quarter's rent.

The plan was a troublesome one, and entailed, besides, more expense than the deducted quarter would at all cover; but, as there was only a choice of evils, Christine and I thought it, on the whole, the best thing open to us.

To what farm-house, or cheap watering-place, we should repair in the meantime, was a question not easily decided; and Christine's perplexities were rather increased than diminished by receiving for herself and her children a most unexpected invitation from an elderly single lady—a relation

of Godfrey's by his mother's side—to spend the latter half of June and the greater part of July with her in her house in town.

My sister-in-law had rather an exaggerated horror of the heat of London in summer, and felt small attraction towards Mrs. Elliott, as she was called, whom she knew but little, and of whom she said:—

“She was sure she only asked *her* because her niece was gone abroad on a two months' holiday, and she was afraid of being alone with her servants.”

She wrote, therefore, to excuse herself on the ground of her party being too large to be easily accommodated in a moderate-sized house, and was not sorry, as she jokingly observed, to make a bugbear of me, to reconcile Mrs. Elliott to the failure of her plan.

I did not prove to be a bugbear, however; for there arrived, by return of post;

so pressing a renewal of the first invitation, coupled with such a courteous expression of a desire to make my acquaintance, that I could no longer serve as a pretext for declining.

Neither was there—at that time being—any reason why I should dislike forming one of the party (if it suited Christine to accept), for, as I had just learnt from Mrs. Wroughton that my mother had let her house in Eaton Square for the season, and was now with her husband in Paris, I could run no risk of those painful meetings, the chance of which would have been, in general, an insuperable bar to my sojourning in London.

Our being forced, at any rate, to leave home, certainly made it very difficult to refuse; and when, on a re-perusal of Godfrey's last letter, Christine grew sanguine enough to fancy he might be on shore by the

middle of July, she immediately began to hope for the possibility of his arrival before we had left Mrs. Elliott's, and of his being thus able himself to choose our residence during the remaining time of our banishment from Tynteford.

All the advantages of the scheme now became apparent to her; and the near neighbourhood of Mrs. Elliott's house to Kensington Gardens reconciled her greatly to London for the children in summer; while I was pleased to put off the responsibility of house-hunting (though I did not quite share Christine's expectation of getting rid of it altogether), and was also truly happy in the prospect of again seeing Mrs. Wroughton.

We accepted, therefore; and, after a world of troublesome business in packing, and in removing and putting away our private possessions, besides duly bidding farewell to

62 THE LEES OF BLENDON HALL.

the family at the Rectory, to the curate and his wife, and to the two maiden ladies at Oak Lodge, we set off on the fifteenth of June for London, in fine weather, and altogether under favourable circumstances for a journey, if it had not been that Christine was, at the last, seized with a fear lest she should, after all, have made a mistake, and lest Philip and Arthur should prove a great deal too noisy to be acceptable to their elderly relation.

Her nervousness on the subject of "how we should get on with our hostess" somewhat infected me; but on arriving we were both agreeably disappointed by the welcome we one and all received from the rather blunt-mannered, but actively kind and good-humoured old lady.

She did not seem to think too much could be done to accommodate the children and their attendants, which won her Chris-

tine's heart at once; while, as she pronounced me, at the first glance, "Godfrey Lee's own sister, but handsomer," I was bound at least to attribute to her the quality of good taste.

It is true that in the course of the first evening she pretty plainly let out the fact that she would never have invited us, had there been anyone else she could have ventured to ask, without being prepared "to turn her house out of windows for their amusement," but we were not disposed to sift too curiously the motives of one who appeared extremely glad to see us, for whatever cause, and quite ready to reward us for keeping her company at certain hours, by leaving great part of our time at our own disposal, as well as by placing her carriage and domestics (within certain bounds), at our service.

Her established hours for meals were

not under any circumstance to be interfered with; and she expected all our evenings to be devoted to her; both which claims she stated to us in a polite form of words, but with the decision of one who is used—and intends—to be obeyed, telling us, however, that we might ask any one we pleased to luncheon, and that, “as she never drove in the Park,” she should have all the more time to convey us of an afternoon to whatever shops or private houses it suited us to visit.

Christine and I, who, with little Alswitha, made ourselves very comfortable in the bed-room and dressing-room habitually occupied by our hostess’s niece, agreed at night that we should get on very well where we were for six weeks, and manage to do various things we wished to do, but that Mrs. Bertha Elliott’s mode of entertaining her guests would seem very dismal to most

persons coming to stay in a fashionable quarter of London, with the usual notions of what "a visit in town" ought to be.

The little boys were delighted ; the horses and carriages, omnibuses, and occasional soldiers accounted sufficiently for that ; while, as there was a plentiful table, and a good-natured gossiping lady's maid—not to speak of other social attractions that may have existed—it followed that Christine's nurse and my attendant were equally enchanted with the change.

The first visit that I paid was to Mrs. Wroughton, whom I found well and prosperous, her children in good health, and her husband as busy as he could be.

"Are you happy, Alswitha?" was the first thing she said to me, when we were alone.

"As happy, I suppose, as a person of my mood and disposition is likely to be. I

am very fond of Christine and the children ; and both she and my brother are as kind as it is possible to be."

My answer pleased her, I saw, and after questioning me on all particulars of my present way of life with the eager interest warranted by her former position and constant attachment, she said frankly how glad she was that her fears for the result of my change of residence had proved groundless.

"So I am thankful," continued she, "that you took your own way, and did not mind my advice, which, considering I was ten years your governess, is a great admission."

"Yes, for any one but you!" cried I, "only *you* never valued authority more than truth and kindness! which is why I always hate doing things you disapprove of! What may be the end, I cannot tell

—who can? But hitherto I have not repented quitting my mother's house."

"Have you heard anything of Hugh Wyndham," asked she, "since his acknowledging the letter my husband forwarded to him last year?"

"No," said I; "have you?"

But beyond what she had told me of him months back, she knew nothing, except that Mr. Wroughton had understood from young Sir Henry Dashwood that he had not been in England since his wife's death.

"I conclude that the first thing we shall hear of him," observed I, "will be that he is going to be married."

"It may be so," replied my friend, after a pause, "but I hardly think he will be in such a hurry as you suppose."

"He would not be in a hurry delibe-

rately, if one may use such an Irish way of speaking," said I, smiling; "but I think he is easily and quickly pleased, and, if he does but light on something not too childish to value him as he deserves, the sooner I hear he has replaced Rosa Glynne, the better I shall be pleased."

I spoke my real feelings, or what I thought were such; but my friend was so astonished at my words and manner, that she asked hastily "what had made me so philosophical?"

"Time and absence, I suppose," answered I, "joined to the conviction that, in the first place, Hugh Wyndham is likely to marry among the set he is intimate with, and in the second, that if he *were* to go out of his way to seek me, I could not marry him without utterly offending Godfrey."

"Is that an absolute certainty?" asked she.

"Most absolute," I replied.

"I should not have thought," she resumed, "that Captain Lee would be so ruled by prejudices at this time of day; but, since it is true that, as things stand, Captain Wyndham *would* have to go a great deal out of his way to meet you again, I think you are wise in regulating yourself according to the convictions you are impressed with;" and she said no more on the subject, either then or on any subsequent occasion.

We met frequently, however, and I could see the satisfaction it gave to my best of all friends to find that the amount of cheerfulness and interest in my brother's family, of which I had given token at our first meeting, was permanent and abiding, not assumed or forced for the moment;

and she once or twice repeated that Tynteford and Mrs. Lee had done me a great deal of good, in a tone which seemed to express that she thought me not only happier from alteration of circumstances, but from some inward change for the better.

During this renewal of the walks and talks of former days, I was for ever wishing for self-possession enough to ask my friend the question I had so often inwardly debated, namely, whether the circumstance of no conversation having ever passed between us on the subject of my father's death was simply due to accident, or was owing to some peculiar injunctions laid on her when I was first put under her charge.

I once or twice began to frame the preliminary words, but my heart always failed me, and I never got nearer the fact

(which I regarded as a sort of touchstone) than once hearing Mrs. Wroughton say to Christine, while discussing the character of some painfully timid child, "that Alswitha must have been just such another, for that she had been given so many cautions to avoid saying anything before her 'that could make her nervous,' that she had been half afraid of undertaking the care of her."

These words struck me, and inclined me to look on the question I had never ventured to ask, as answered.

CHAPTER V.

MRS. BERTHA ELLIOTT evidently marvelled a good deal at the very narrow range of my London acquaintance, which began with Mrs. Wroughton, and ended with Mrs. Hedworth and her daughter, of whom I saw a good deal, considering that we were in a house looking on the Park, not far from the Victoria Gate of Kensington Gardens, while they, besides being full of engagements, were in a hotel in Albemarle Street.

Miss Austen was certainly right in the

opinion expressed by her heroine Emma, that whatever may be the condition in society of a *poor* old maid, a rich one, if not too glaringly ill-natured, will be generally well received. Dora Hedworth, at any rate, who, though still a strikingly handsome woman, was not a day under thirty-three, would undoubtedly have been set down as a "faded beauty," had she been the eldest of five sisters, and had her known large fortune been correspondingly split into five portions; but as it was, her existence in society appeared to me to be most agreeable, and to be much more on a footing with that of a married woman, or a widow, than that which is usually allotted to a "single woman of a certain age." She had, it is true, had the sense to give up dancing, besides having the tact to avoid doing and saying a number of little indescribable things which might

have led "unfriendly critics" to say she still endeavoured to pass herself off for a girl; and though her sarcastic speeches and capricious uncertainty of manner made her many enemies, I do not think *that* precise accusation was ever brought against her. She was happier, I thought, in London than in her home; for the constant intercourse with old acquaintances, and the amusement of forming new ones, provided her with an excitement which filled up the "aching void" I believed her constantly to feel at Birkstone House. I did not, of course, *meet* her among her London friends; for, being lodged in a hotel, they received no company either at dinner or evening parties; and, even if they had, the domestic arrangements of Mrs. Elliott's household must have precluded our taking part in such entertainments.

These "domestic arrangements" so much excited Dora's spleen on our account, that we thought ourselves happy—and considered it, moreover, as a strong proof of her liking for us—that she consented to be invariably civil to Mrs. Elliott, who, as a matter of almost necessary consequence with a person who could be so agreeable when she chose, soon granted her a considerable portion of regard.

These arbitrary rules laid down by our hostess would have pressed severely upon many of my age and position; but, as they did not happen to jar violently against any aims or ends of Christine's or mine, *we* could be content to laugh at them, and to consider them more as odd and old-fashioned than irksome and unkind.

I had been so often drawn up and down the drive in the Park in my mother's britschka, looking at a crowd of people I

was tired of seeing, and of whom I knew scarce one, that I deemed it no misfortune to be hindered by Mrs. Elliott's dislike to that manner of taking the air, and by the earliness of her dinner-hour, from any repetition of a pastime I never enjoyed.

The forenoons she always spent in a sort of boudoir, where she cast up accounts, tried on gowns, and did a world of petty business, which she managed to spread over the whole space between breakfast and luncheon-time; in consequence of which habit, Christine and I were free to follow our own devices during the whole morning, which I usually began by taking a walk with one or both of my nephews in Kensington Gardens.

They were in their greatest beauty, for, the spring having been late, the foliage had not yet lost that freshness which is

so transient in London above other places, and I exceedingly enjoyed roaming at will in the less frequented parts of those pleasant groves, into which I had scarcely ever penetrated in the days of my actual residence in town, though of course I had then been occasionally brought to pace up and down the more regular walks.

Philip and Arthur thought it happiness unspeakable to be allowed to carry food to the water-fowl, both in the nearer piece of water, and in the pool in the centre of the space before the Palace; while I, not being permitted, though dining at six, to go out in the evening, and finding the afternoons generally filled up with shopping or business of one kind or other, was glad of the freshening cheerfulness of those morning walks, on which Christine was rarely able to accompany

me, but on which I could always have the society, and, so to speak, the protection of the little squires of the body, whose talk was generally as entertaining to me as their presence was convenient.

“A child is always sufficient chaperon, as my mother used often to say,” observed Mrs. Elliott, sententiously, at luncheon, by way of approving of my mode of taking exercise ; and huge, as I could see, was my eldest nephew’s surprise and self-exaltation on making the discovery that his attendance was of importance enough to influence, in any way, the facilities for locomotion of so great a lady as Aunt Alswitha. But if Philip was proud of being *my* escort, he was prouder still when it once happened that Dora Hedworth, moved by one of her sudden fancies to do something she was not used to, and encouraged by the beauty of the

weather, made her appearance among us early enough to join our morning walk. She was in high spirits, and in a mood to enjoy everything, besides being very full of the prospect of going with a party of friends to the Caledonian ball, which was to take place in a few days, and was this year expected to be very brilliant, very well worth looking at indeed, for those who only regarded such things as a "spectacle."

She talked on eagerly, and was consulting me about some trifling addition to her dress (which was not to be a fancy one), when she all of a sudden recollected that I had never been to a ball in my life, and remembered also my having once said to her, at Tynteford, "that I should like to see one, if I could go there without seeming to expect to dance." In an instant she had formed

the project of taking me with her party to the Caledonian, declaring that this was the best opportunity I could ever have of gratifying my curiosity, and that Mrs. Elliott's household need not be disturbed on the occasion, for that I should join them in the afternoon in Albemarle Street, dine with them, go with them, and share her room at night, or, rather, in the morning, when we returned from the ball. Dora was somewhat despotic, and my arguments against the plan went for nothing. She said "it was to be;" proposed it to Christine the moment we re-entered the house, talked her into submission in a very few minutes, stayed to have luncheon, and then and there announced her "designs upon me," as she expressed it to old Mrs. Elliott, who, strange to say, seemed rather pleased than otherwise. I wished I had never

made that unlucky speech at Tynteford ; but, as everyone approved, and I had, in fact, nothing to urge against Dora's plan, which was very good-naturedly meant, I acquiesced, and went with her that afternoon to order just such a dress as was needful for those who, like Dora and myself, were not going to adopt any fanciful costume.

My repugnance to the scheme and all connected with it was excessive ; but to give the grounds of that repugnance would have been to tell that which I was resolved to tell to no one. I was ashamed of the weakness which made it such misery to me to try on the white-watered silk Dora had recommended me to choose ; and yet more ashamed of the difficulty I had in swallowing my tears, when the beautiful wreath of water-lilies which was to form my head-dress arrived from Foster's.

Christine took the most innocent pleasure

in arranging everything that could conduce to my adornment, made sure that "though this was the first, it would not be the last ball I should go to," and then wondered at me for my queer, composed way of setting about what was generally a sort of excitement to other girls, no matter how many balls they had been to!

There was very little composure in my heart; but it was a satisfaction to find I could assume it so well, while my mind was ceaselessly occupied with the vivid recollections of all that had been said and done seven years back about *that* ball at Mrs. Stratton's. As frequently happens, however, the thing itself was much less melancholy than the anticipation; if I had dressed at Mrs. Elliott's, I might have had hard work to preserve my equanimity; but to dress in Dora Hedworth's room

was a perfectly different matter; and, as the party of friends who had agreed to go together all dined together likewise, I was obliged to exert myself, and soon felt that the "black care" which had so clung to me, was now flung far enough behind to admit of my being fit company for a set of pleasure-seekers.

It was fortunate that my mood was thus lightened beforehand, for with the scene itself I was, I confess, somewhat disappointed. Had I witnessed it all from a high gallery, whence individual absurdities would not have been visible, and the brilliant colours of the gay garb of the majority only seen in masses, then perhaps I might have experienced some of that rapturous admiration which seems to have prompted the intoxicating descriptions of similar festivities, that are often to be found in print.

84 THE LEES OF BLENDON HALL.

Many beautiful women and many very handsome men did I see that night; but there, at that fancy ball, even as in a country market-place, or in a crowded London church, the plain predominated over the beautiful, and the lack of taste exhibited by ill-dressed Spaniards, Poles, and would-be Highlanders, who had never worn the kilt before, was, to a mere spectator, sobering in the extreme.

I had been very considerably handed over to a certain good-natured, elderly Colonel Marston (I suspected him of being privately an aspirant to Dora's hand), and this gentleman—who was acquainted with almost every one he saw, and on familiar terms with many of the "leaders of the fashion"—was very kind in pointing out to me every one remarkable for birth, beauty, or position.

I had just been making the reflection that

all those who were pointed out to me as "beauties" did not invariably deserve the epithet, when a lady of whom I had had a glimpse earlier in the evening, while dancing, or walking rather, in a quadrille consisting of personages of the time of Edward IV., stopped, and stood near us for some time. I had been told before that she represented Elizabeth Woodville; and verily if that fair widow was half as lovely as her personator of that night, no one need wonder that King' Edward should, for her sake, have braved the wrath of the haughty maker and unmaker of kings. She was leaning on the arm of a gentleman, who, as I judged by the velvet cap looped up with a diamond "fleur de lis," intended himself for that capricious monarch; but though handsome, he was foppish and effeminate looking, and did not at all come up to

my idea of him whom Philippe de Comines designated as "le plus beau prince qu'onques vis-je."

I was vexed to see that the beautiful Elizabeth seemed to take considerable pleasure in the "soft nothings" which her "King Edward" was apparently addressing to her, but I could not take my eyes from that exquisite face, that graceful figure, and I waited impatiently till Colonel Marston was freed from a talkative acquaintance who was engrossing him, and I could ask "who that lovely creature was?"

"Oh, don't you know? I thought everybody must recognise the original of the picture in last year's exhibition—Grant's best beyond a doubt—Lady Southborough."

I thought my old esquire must have seen the start I gave, must have perceived the sort of tremor that came over me, as

I gazed upon her, and thought how little she suspected whose sister was watching her, and what that sister knew! I felt too conscious to ask who "King Edward" was, but my companion volunteered the information that he was Lord Charles Sackville, and muttered something about his being "with her everywhere," adding in the same tone that "Lord Southborough was a great fool."

Almost as he said these words, there was a sort of move on all sides, for the band had just struck up the first notes of the "Post-horn Galope," and a long lane was being formed for the dancers, who presently began to dash past us with the speed of the wind; and at the sound of that spirited music, and the sight of those "flying feet," I forgot Lady Southborough, forgot Godfrey, forgot my sense of the vanity and unprofitableness of all under the

sun, in the one feeling that I would have given worlds to be dancing too! I felt my heart beat violently, and wondered what it was that so moved me. It was the sign, I suppose, that, however it might have seemed quenched by sorrow and humiliation, the fire of youth was still glowing within; for my elderly companion, who was looking on at the same scene with a face of good-natured amusement, merely observed with a smile that "*that* was a pleasure he could not understand; it was such a very hardworking dance."

What answer I made, I do not know, but I stood there till, just as the galope was drawing to a close, Dora Hedworth, and the cousin with whom *she* had been walking about, came up and proposed that we should go as soon as it was over, "if I had seen as much as I liked."

I had seen as much as I liked, as I could

safely assure her, and when the last notes of that beautiful horn had died away, we moved as quickly as we could through the crowded room, picking up Mrs. Hedworth and her other friends as we went.

We found a sort of "tea-supper" awaiting us on our return, so that our party did not immediately disperse, and I went to bed, for the first time in my life, by daylight! Dora Hedworth soon slept soundly, but I closed my eyes in vain, for the sound of that Post-horn Galope kept ringing in my ears, and visions of Lilian Annesley, and Godfrey, and Hugh Wyndham, and Bampton Chase, and again of my father in the Blendon library, rose before me in an endless succession that banished rest, and I believe I looked as little refreshed as I felt, when I appeared before the eyes of kind Mrs. Hedworth at breakfast. I could say with truth, however (now it was all over),

that I was much obliged to her and Dora, and glad "to have seen a ball, though I had no wish to repeat the experiment," which was much the account I gave of myself to Christine and Mrs. Elliott, whom I joined by luncheon time.

I believe the old lady was rather disappointed by my inability to describe to her exactly, and in the most minute detail, the dress of each several lady patroness, and I had to listen to a long story about a great fancy-ball in Edinburgh, at which she had assisted in the days of her youth, as well as to her opinions respecting the polka, which dance, be it observed, she had never witnessed, but to which she nevertheless attributed every scandal in high or in low life since its introduction. Having delivered herself of this lecture, she dismissed the subject of my ball, and all things returned to their accustomed channel.

CHAPTER VI.

As we entered into the month of July, Christine began to be again agitated by the question of "what was to become of us, in case Godfrey did not appear by the 20th," on which day Mrs. Elliott was to set off for Tunbridge Wells, where she expected to be joined by her niece. It chanced, however, that our hostess's breast was at least as much disturbed by a matter connected with her household arrangements, as Christine's could be by doubts concerning Godfrey's coming and our own move-

ments. Her cook happened to be a new servant, and was, moreover, a youngish woman; which combined facts led to some prudential and moral doubts, on the part of her mistress, as to the expediency of leaving one so untried, in every sense, in charge of the house on her own responsibility for the summer months—a trust fulfilled year after year by her elderly predecessor. It had, therefore, occurred to the practical brain of Mrs. Bertha (who would not hear of the “new cook’s” being “protected” by any of her own friends, and was, moreover, exceedingly suspicious of “new people” in general) that if *we* would only consent to occupy the house during her absence, her mind would be at rest respecting her goods and chattels, while Christine, supposing her willing to remain where we were, with only our own servants and the mistrusted

cook, would at least be paying no rent : a circumstance which the old lady probably commented upon to herself as " a great thing for the Lees." But though Mrs. Elliott had already planned this, and though she was not, in general, backward in expressing her wishes, yet, in this matter of proposing to her relation to do such a disagreeable, nay, even, as many deem it, pernicious thing, as to spend the whole summer in London, she hesitated to speak ; and it was not till the confidential talk of my maid, Coulson, with hers, had made her aware of our dilemma, that she considered she had a handle given her for mentioning it.

Having once understood our difficulties, she frankly stated her own, saying courteously, that " she had not ventured to ask such a favour, till she became aware that circumstances might render the grant-

ing of it a convenience," while Christine, on her part, accepted the offer gratefully, admitting, with equal frankness, that she always *had* thought London in the summer must be a dreadful place for children, but now saw hers had never been better in their lives, and honestly thought it would do them more good to go to the sea-side—if their father liked it—in the autumn.

"Godfrey will not be sorry," said she to me after all was settled, "to have an excuse for spending some days in London, even at this time of year, before we go to Weymouth or Lymington; he is so very fond of poking about in scientific instrument makers' shops; besides that I know he wishes literally to 'show the lions' to the boys at the Zoological, and I am quite glad he should have the opportunity."

Our anxieties and responsibilities were,

therefore, again set at rest; and, as the post of the following day brought Christine the unexpected intelligence that her sister, Mrs. Hyndley, was coming up to London to be attended by Dr. N—— in her confinement, and as, moreover, the apartments secured for the purpose were within five minutes' walk of our present abode, her satisfaction was complete. Neither was I displeased with the arrangement; for, like Godfrey, I had no objection to London in itself, though its attractions for me were not precisely the same as those it had for him.

I had lived within so very confined a radius, there was always in my mother's house so much settling beforehand, even when there was nothing to be settled, except that the carriage should take Miss Sherer and me to the Exhibition, that I never saw many things and places which

it interested me to see, till I came to London as a "country visitor."

The Hedworths had already left town; but Mrs. Wroughton was always my pleased companion, especially to those sights in any way connected with objects of art; for July is not too late for many galleries, both public and private, to be open.

When at last Mrs. Elliott's departure left us without a carriage, distant expeditions were not so easy for me; but then, on the other hand, we lived more freely and independently in some respects, having the disposal of our time and the allotment of our hours much more at our command than previously. We could now, if we chose, go and sit, towards six o'clock, in the chairs in Rotten Row, to see what remaining riders, male and female, still graced the town, without hurrying home for Mrs. Bertha Elliott's dinner; and if, on an occasional hot after-

noon, we preferred passing our evening another way, we had tea at six, and strolled from seven till eight in the lovely cool gardens, whose trees retained their beauty, after those in the squares had become dusty and parched-looking.

During this first fortnight of our hostess's absence, all Christine's friends and acquaintances dropped off, one by one; but it was then we saw the Halseys, who, on returning from their long sojourn on the Continent, spent a few days in town. It was a painful duty to call on them, since it forced me (through the neighbourhood of their house to my mother's) to pass by that dwelling, which, unhappily as I had lived in it, I could never behold without such a mixture of emotions, as I found it difficult to free myself from, for many an hour afterwards.

There it was I had first known Miss

Sherer, and learnt, under her good influence, to love my sister Emmeline; there I had lost and bewailed that innocent little being, and there also I had received Hugh Wyndham's farewell and parting kiss.

My cousins were very kind in inviting me, for some time in the autumn, to their country home; but I felt it as a relief when their departure freed me from the the necessity of visiting them in London.

By the end of July, when even Mrs. Wroughton had at last followed the general move out of town, we began to be in some expectation of Godfrey; for though no one could reckon on any precise day for his arrival, it was already thought near enough for many things to be considered with reference to it, and for the little boys to tell their sister every morning

that she must learn to say this, and do the other, "because papa was coming, and must not find her a baby."

Christine, however, was not so anxious as to be incapable of amusement; and, strange as it may seem to those who have resided much in London, she did find a sort of amusement in watching our neighbourhood, in its gradual progress toward that thorough aspect of a "deserted city," which our metropolis assumes in the months of August and September.

She had heard of it, and read of it, and took a kind of pleasure in witnessing the fact. It followed, that she seldom came back from her constant visits to her sister, without some such observation as, "Well, Alswitha, No. 15 is shut up to-day," or, "I saw three cabs, with boxes inside and out, drive off to the Great Western Station from No. 12;" and some-

times, "Do you know we were mistaken about No. 10? The people are there still. I think there is some illness in the house."

Our own immediate neighbours on the right hand side had been flown for some weeks; but it remained a question whether those on our left had as yet followed their example; and Christine's desire to settle this point produced some inquiries, the result of which tended to prove that whatever *had* inhabited the house, did inhabit it still.

"It's an old lady, an invalid, nurse tells me," said Christine to me, one evening, just before our early tea, "yet there is nobody with her, and when she does go out, it is in a close carriage, all by herself."

"Oh, no, mamma;" cried Philip, "the poor old lady *has* got somebody with her now;

Coulson says there has been a gentleman there since Tuesday."

I don't exactly know how it happened, for, of all people I ever met, Christine was the least inclined to dispute what was said either by grown-up persons or children; but it did befall, that on this occasion she was so convinced that Philip was mistaken, and only speaking for the pleasure of setting her right, that she told him so; while he, resenting the doubt thrown on his accuracy, persisted in his assertion, and finally appealed for justification to the nurse, who was just bringing in little Alswitha.

Thus called upon, she was willing, for the sake of indulging in a few minutes' gossip, to admit that Master Philip was right, and she herself mistaken; for "Coulson had seen the gentleman, and a very handsome young gentleman he is too. She showed him to me, ma'am, not half-an-hour ago, handing the old lady out of the carriage,

and I am sure he must be her son, ma'am, he did it all so tender and dutiful."

I cannot say these circumstances interested me particularly, but Christine, the universal sympathizer, was immediately pleased to hear that this solitary being (as she had supposed her next door neighbour to be) had some one to care for her; and then proceeded, as nobody could tell her her name, to look for it in the Blue Book, where it was given as Pringle.

This fact once established, the Pringles, mother and son, were forgotten in the business of the tea-table, from which, however, Philip made his escape, as soon as he had finished his meal, to play on the balcony till we were ready to take our walk.

Presently his voice was heard, calling eagerly to his mother,—

"Come here; come here!"

She flew out upon the balcony, thinking, I

believe, that the child was in some danger or difficulty ; but before a minute was over, she came as hurriedly back again, pulling Philip in along with her, and saying, with flushed cheeks, and a look in which annoyance and an inclination to laugh struggled for the mastery,—

“You should not have called me in that way ! people think it rude when others come on purpose to stare at them. Now go upstairs, and tell nurse to get you ready.”

Philip obeyed, while his mother, as the door shut after him, threw herself into a chair to indulge her mirth, and to explain, in a low voice, that nurse’s “handsome young man ” was on Mrs. Pringle’s balcony, and that Philip had very coolly pointed to him, saying (she hoped not loud enough for him to hear), “There’s the gentleman, mamma !” She added that, by the glimpse she had had, nurse had not said too much of his good looks ; “but,” con-

tinued she, "as I don't want him to think we spend our whole time in admiring him through the muslin curtains, I could have excused being called out on the balcony to look at him."

CHAPTER VII.

I WELL remember that the day succeeding this little adventure was the most sultry, as also the last, of a series of very hot days: so hot, that the geraniums with which Mrs. Bertha had filled her balcony required a double dose of watering, and that all other exercise, for pleasure at least, was deferred till it was nearly dusk.

But that night some rain fell, and as the following morning was sensibly cooler, Master Philip, who had sorrowed considerably over the interruption of our visits to the water

and the water fowl, besought me to take him there directly after breakfast. I consented, and we set forth walking very leisurely, for, though considerably fresher, the weather was still too warm for much exertion.

My companion began to talk as usual, and he was gravely consulting me as to the probability of his papa's bringing him home a poll-parrot, when, just as we had crossed the road into the park, I noticed quick steps behind us, heard myself called by my name, and turning round, saw, to my unspeakable surprise, Hugh Wyndham!

I held out my hand, which he grasped and wrung as if he would never have let it go again, being, as I could see, unable, from an excess of emotion, to greet me in words at that moment.

"I had no notion you were in England!" said I, "far less in London!"

"I might have been here long enough without being the better for it! but I began to suspect yesterday, and discovered for certain two minutes ago, that we were next-door neighbours! How near and how far one may be in this place! And how changed everything has been both for you and for me, in these two years and a-half that have gone by!"

A deep shade of sadness overspread his face as he spoke, and I perceived, what had not struck me at the first glance, that he was a good deal altered. He was thinner, and his features, though still delicate, were more marked than when I first knew him; besides a change in their expression, which might be permanent—might be only the passing effect of his meeting the confidant of his love for her he had lost.

I stood still, echoing his words, and

repeating "how changed!" when my little companion, wearied with the delay in our progress towards the bourne of *his* hopes, (the pool for water-fowl, namely), pulled me by the gown, looking up in my face as if to say, "Don't lose our precious time, aunt."

"Be patient, Philip," said I; "we are going on directly."

"Where are you going in such a hurry?" asked Hugh.

"There's no hurry at all," I began, but was interrupted by my nephew's saying, half to me, half to the intruder, as he considered him,—

"I want to get there before those other boys! the ducks come so nicely when there's only me!"

"Then you are bound for the water yonder, are you, my man?" asked Hugh Wyndham of the boy. "Let us all go that way at once," continued he, as he made a

move to accompany us, and then walked on beside me, not exactly in silence, but only saying a word or two now and then till we reached the Gardens.

On entering these, he seemed to be turning towards the Bayswater Gate, when Philip, fearful of being told to content himself with feeding the fowls in that direction, looked up, and said in a melancholy tone,—

“The water *I* like, is much farther!”

But he was presently reassured by our new friend's exclaiming,—

“The farther the better! I have no end of things to say, yet feel as if I could get nothing out just now; so I want a long walk.”

“We shall have one,” said I, “for I promised Philip to let him stay full twenty minutes with his ducks, whose haunts we shall be some time reaching.”

"Thank you," returned he after a pause; "but is it not strange that I, who have been longing all these fifteen months past to speak to you, have not a word for you now?"

"Not strange at all, I think," replied I.

"Ah, you are very kind," said he, sadly, "but *I* am disappointed, because—I don't know how it was—I thought I should feel different."

"You had so kind a remembrance of a distant friend," said I, not without effort, "as to fancy she could give you what she *would* so gladly give—comfort! but, dear Hugh, no human creature can."

"No, no; it wasn't that exactly, for I know too well that what's lost is lost—and no help for it—in this life at least. But there were things—I couldn't say them to my mother, couldn't to my sisters,

for they would have misunderstood and exaggerated my meaning, perhaps formed false and injurious notions of her who is gone—and I thought I could bring them out to you—only, as you see, I can't."

I knew not whether to be silent, or to try and divert his mind, since I could hardly hope to soothe it; but, feeling that there must be something hollow, almost unfriendly, in seeking to shun or glide over what I saw was filling his thoughts, I forcibly overcame the shyness which urged me to fly the subject, and said, after walking on some minutes in silence:—

"That I had only known her he had lost through his accounts, and through one sight of her lovely outward form; but," continued I, "the impression thus made on me, was *not* such as I could easily change for one less favourable. You need fear no misinterpretation from me! So

tell me—if you can bear it, that is—tell me whatever it might lighten your heart to tell!”

“I don’t know after all if it would!” said he, “but, the truth is, I wasn’t worthy of being so happy; and can I complain if the source of my best joys is dried up?”

“It is beyond my power to believe or to fancy,” I replied, “that you should have been unkind or neglectful towards the being you most loved.”

“Neglectful! No, not that, thank God!—nor unkind exactly, I hope, either; but still, I know I did not always value her enough; for, after our honeymoon, when we were settled, as much as we ever were settled, at Corfu, I sometimes let myself be annoyed, as I never should have let myself be, by little thoughtlessnesses in her, for which I ought to have

made allowance, considering what she had been used to; and I am aware I was hard on her, more than once, for what I called pieces of fine-ladyism that were nothing but childishness and want of experience, which I ought to have expected and reckoned upon. True, we never had a quarrel or half-quarrel, but I felt fonder of her than ever after making up; yet I wasn't always fair—not always reasonable; and then when I was losing her, the recollection of having done her a moment's injustice, if it were but that, came back on me—and—I don't know how I survived it!”

“We always wonder how that was,” returned I, “when we have outlived a great sorrow or a great humiliation; but I am certain it is your own scrupulousness of mind and strong affection that make you dwell so painfully on these

things, though I understand it well and very well. No man and woman living constantly together, whether brother and sister or husband and wife, ever existed half a year absolutely without differences; and I feel sure yours were all made up—sure your faults, so far as they were faults, were all forgiven you!”

“Forgiven by *her*! Oh yes! angelically forgiven! I should have gone mad else; but I have never forgiven myself. Fancy, Alswitha, I—*we*—had but two hours’ warning! I thought everything was going right, so did all around, and then, on a sudden, I learnt we were to be parted for ever.”

He paused, unable to continue his self-accusing lamentation, and when I could command my voice, I said:—

“It was a hard, a bitter trial; God only can help us to endure such.”

“Yes; for God sends us the friends who sympathize so deeply, who advise so tenderly!” ejaculated he sadly, but more mildly than when he last spoke.

“You see, Alswitha, *I* used to lecture *you*; and now I am come to you, in my turn, to get counsel and kindness. If I had said what I have been just saying to any of my own people,—to be sure, they none of them precisely liked the marriage,—it’s ten to one but they would have drawn conclusions that would have driven me insane—or would have said she must have been extravagant, or a flirt—or—fifty things as absurd; so I could never allude, with them, to the sharpest pang of the whole wound, the torment that has beset me every morning when I waked to loneliness and misery.”

We were now interrupted by the exclamations of joy with which Philip saluted the, as yet, distant sight of the piece of

water in the open space to which the Palace forms a background. He ran back to us, exulting in the belief that he was the first visitor (laden with a well-filled basket) whom the ducks would have the pleasure of receiving that morning, and then hastened on to feed his friends, while we followed leisurely and in silence, till on the child's becoming eagerly engaged in supplying the birds with biscuit and crumbs, Hugh Wyndham and I seated ourselves together on the trunk of a felled tree, when he resumed the broken thread of his discourse, and plunged into a sea of fond recollections and piercing regrets; now dilating on the early bliss of his union with Rosa, now describing her last moments with painful minuteness, while I listened without uttering a word, but with an attention and interest that satisfied and soothed him. When he had, at last, given vent to his feelings,

“as he had never” he said, “yet done to mortal,” he expressed shame for his selfishness in being so diffuse upon his own lot, his own sorrows and crosses, without giving token of interest in aught besides, without even asking what had been *my* doings since we had lost sight of each other.

My doings! *They* could be succinctly related; but their motives, but their consequences, how was I to touch on them? It was all I could do to reply intelligibly to his kindly repeated questions, and when I spoke, the bareness of my narration was such as must, I think, have struck him; only, I believe he attributed it solely to my repugnance to dwelling either on the reasons or circumstances of my quitting my mother, and he considerably forbore to press me on the subject.

“I have no right to blame you,” he said, “for leaving Owen’s house. I know you

were not happy there, nor likely to be so; yet, the truth is, I couldn't bear your doing what could give room for criticism, even unjustly; couldn't bear your giving a handle to my brother (with whom, be it observed, I have made peace within this last month), to say anything to your disadvantage, with a show of plausibility. The thing's done now; and if you are happy in your brother's family, why, I can have nothing to say, except that, for my own selfish sake, I wish you were with people among whom you would be more accessible to me, when I want to talk of things no one else would listen to,—but that is pure selfishness—still, I wish you were with the Halseys, instead."

"I may be with them for a while towards autumn," said I; "but tell me now how you came to be our next door neighbour, and what that old Mrs. Pringle you are staying with is to you?"

"I'm staying with no Mrs. Pringle—haven't the honour of the good lady's acquaintance!" replied he, his old smile lighting up his features for a moment. "She has let her house to my mother, that's all, and I have been keeping *her* company these few days; but your nephew has emptied his basket, the last goose has gobbled the last crumb, and here he comes, resigned to walk homewards with you."

We rose accordingly, and while we retraced our steps to the Park, Hugh Wyndham explained to me, more at large, what he had just stated briefly.

Old Mrs. Wyndham had, it appeared, been obliged to quit the country abode she had not stirred from for years, partly to be present at the wedding of a granddaughter who had always lived with her, the child of her deceased eldest daughter (whose father, living in

town with his second wife and family, had made a point of her being married from his house), partly by the necessity, simultaneously occurring, of making repairs of a very essential kind in her own dwelling near ——. The wedding had been over some weeks; and several country mansions occupied by different members of her family were open to her, as places of sojourn, till such time as her home should be ready for her reception; but she hated travelling, and dreaded rail-roads, thought she had made a great exertion in coming up to London; and, finding herself comfortable in Mrs. Pringle's luxuriously furnished house, had decided that she would only leave it to take the sole and single journey needful to convey her to her own. London's being full or empty mattered little to her; she rather preferred the quietness of the dead months, while she shrank from the bustle of the large

parties she would be thrown among in the residences of her sons-in-law.

“I have done what I could,” said Hugh, “to persuade her that she would be as quiet as she can wish, in her own corner at my sister’s in Berkshire ; but she won’t hear of it ; so, since we none of us like her being quite alone (as she would be, now Anne Gisborne is married), I believe it is rather my duty, having no home of my own, and being lately come to England on leave, to make her house my headquarters for the present ; though, except for the good chance of meeting you, I had rather she had pitched her tent elsewhere. Hitherto, indeed, I must confess I have had business to get through, that could hardly have been as well settled out of London, and I am not up to more than a day or two at a time in those houses full of nephews and

nieces of mine, who can't see why *I* shouldn't keep the ball up as well as they do. Still, I was just considering, the evening of the day before yesterday, whether there was any one else in the world—not positively obliged—intending to spend August in town, when I happened to hear, through some parleying at the door with a tradesperson, that a family of the name of Lee lived next us. Whether it was Lee, or Legh, or Leigh, I could not learn; it set me thinking of you, though, and I can't tell you how I watched all yesterday! But you never went out of the house (that *I* could perceive), and, though somebody watered the plants on the balcony (I know now by your gown it was you), I could not contrive to catch a sight of the face till this morning, when I saw you crossing the road from our dining-room window, and it

was just all I could do to come up with you in time ! How long do you stay in town ? ”

I replied, “that that depended, first, on how soon my brother came home, which might be any day, and then upon whether it suited him to spend a week in town, or to start for a watering place at once.”

“So you *might* hang on for a fortnight or three weeks,” observed he, in a musing tone. I should like amazingly to call on my next-door neighbour,” he continued ; “but, if you thought that would not exactly do for any reason, why, tell me so plainly.”

“I believe,” said I, “that it would be best left alone ; and yet—”

“I understand, I understand,” interrupted he ; “the least said, the soonest amended. Lees and Wyndhams ! it’s no wonder, and I wish in my heart that Owen had never been the better for a year’s rent of Blendon

Hall. I hate to think of it; but, of course, I come in for my share of the prejudice, and it can't be helped. Where do you walk in general?"

"Aunt Alswitha takes me every morning it's not too hot, round Kensington Gardens," cried Philip, before I could answer.

I believe the child was instinctively afraid of some change being made from the order of things that suited *him*.

"There can't be a nicer walk," remarked Hugh; "it's as good as the country; and you know," added he, turning to me with a smile, "that in August and September, London *is*, in some points, just the same as the country; not in all, to be sure—that cloud of dust, to wit,—but it is considerably more private, for the best of reasons,—there is no one to see you."

"Very few," replied I, smiling, "but, as you may have remarked yourself, in your

last two days' experience, its remaining inhabitants are considerably more watchful of each other's proceedings than when the town is crowded; at least the idle ones are."

"It wasn't idleness made me watch for you all day yesterday," said Hugh, who was by this time looking and talking almost as if nothing sad or serious had ever affected him. "I had a whole heap of business letters of my mother's and my own to read, and was hard at that work from morning till night, except when I went to the window now and then; and I do hope you would have done as much for me, if you had had a suspicion I was next door."

"We are just at home," observed I, as we reached the gate, whence we habitually crossed the road.

"Yes; but *my* present home is alongside of it," returned Hugh; "so there is no difference of ways, till I have seen you

fairly up your steps. Good bye now, but I shall have another walk with you; you don't know the good *this* has done me. Good bye to you too, my little fellow, till you next go duck-feeding."

And having so spoken, and again returned to shake hands with me anew, he went up the steps of Mrs. Pringle's door, and stood there till Philip and I had been let in at our own.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN the hall I saw packages, which made me think—and my companion exclaim, “Papa has come!” and so it proved, for on our entering the drawing-room, there was Godfrey, making acquaintance with little Alswitha, whom all the talk that had gone on around her for the last week had not enabled to receive, without alarm, the caresses of her black-browed and black-whiskered father, while Christine and Arthur, each on one side of him, were both trying at once

to encourage the child, and, as it were, to make apologies for her.

As Philip threw the door open, my brother hastily put the little girl in her mother's arms, and, folding me in his, said warmly:—

“I am a happy man to find *all* I love here!—to find them all well and happy-looking, too!” and he kissed me again, rather to the discomposure of poor Philip, who stood looking up, waiting for his turn with a patience I gave him some credit for, till, when I had made way for him, he was at last so greeted as to satisfy even *his* highly-wrought expectations of all that would happen “when papa came.”

After the remarks, both flattering and critical, upon his and his brother's size, looks, and costume had subsided, the boys simultaneously came out with the (to them) all-absorbing question:—

“Papa! when will you take us to the Zoological?”

"Not to-day, my boys. I'm to see Reeves at the Admiralty at one," said he, turning to Christine, "and no one knows when one may get away from a colloquy of that sort. I won't promise for to-morrow either, Philip, though I *may* manage it; but you may depend on being taken my first free moment; it's a treat I won't cheat *myself* of, I can tell you."

Upon this followed a list of all the many and various things Godfrey had, or wished to do, in town; the length of which showed me that he was likely to take so far advantage of the temporary possession of his cousin's house, as to stay in it at least a week or ten days before we took our flight elsewhere.

"It was really very kind of old Bertha, though you two will have it she has ends of her own, to let us have the use of this neat little nutshell while

she is ruralizing ; I wonder she wasn't afraid of the boys, for all I think they are in fair discipline, considering."

He was evidently pleased not to be obliged to seek and choose a temporary abiding-place the very moment he was on shore ; and when he was gone, as he presently was, to the Admiralty, and Christine off to her sister's, where she was to have luncheon, I was able to reflect, while passing over in my mind the events of the forenoon, on what ought to be my course of conduct. I thought my path plain before me ; for, much as my interest and sympathy had been excited, warmly as I had felt the pleasure of hearing Hugh Wyndham's expressions of grateful friendship, the interview had not bewildered or overpowered me, as I knew it would have done in days gone by ; and, deep as was the emotion it had

stirred within me, what I had felt did not shake the conviction in which I had now long lived—namely, that all that there was of unquiet and unsettling in my affection for him had died away—had rather been quenched at once in the horror of the gulph which, as I now knew, parted us. There could be no reason then, I considered, for my even wishing to avoid the meetings which I was sure would take place (unless I deliberately and palpably shunned them) if we remained next door neighbours for a week or ten days longer.

But, though I was determined, on the one hand, that Hugh should never have it to say “his friend Alswitha had grown cold, and was willing to give him up, to gratify her brother’s prejudices,” I was resolved, on the other, that neither would I make any secret of what intercourse I

might have with him. I was glad of the opportunity, therefore, when Godfrey and Christine came back from their respective engagements late in the afternoon, and he asked me, as he looked carelessly out of the window, "who inhabited the house on our left?" to let him know that it was at this moment tenanted by old Mrs. Wyndham.

"Mrs Wyndham! You don't mean Owen Wyndham's mother?"

"Yes. Owen Wyndham's mother."

"But *they* are not in town?" asked he, while Christine almost at the same moment inquired "how I had heard that the old lady there was not Mrs. Pringle?"

"Owen Wyndham is in the country," said I, turning to my brother; "but," added I, addressing Christine, "I met with Hugh Wyndham this morning in the Park; he joined us, and told me he is

staying just now with his mother, to whom Mrs. Pringle has let her house."

A slight, an almost imperceptible cloud passed over my brother's brow, which cleared, however, as the boys drew near, leading up their sister, "to accustom her," they said, "to the sight of papa;" and as the little lady had by this time passed out of the stage of real terror into that of a feigned timidity, she went through, in acting it, such a course of coquettishly amusing manœuvres that her father's delighted attention was entirely fixed on her, till she and her brothers vanished to take their evening walk in the Park. Godfrey and I looked after them from the balcony, as they set out upon their stroll, but as they disappeared, he said, again looking towards the house on our left:—

"Of course, Alswitha, you cannot, having been formerly thrown into a situation of

intimacy with that young man, turn your back on him in casual meetings; but I would rather he were not introduced to Christine, as, all things considered, I think it better he should not call here."

"There is no likelihood of his doing so," replied I.

"That's all right, then," he observed; and thereupon we left the balcony and went down to dinner.

There was, as it proved, no business impediment next morning to hinder Godfrey from taking the boys on the long talked of expedition to the Zoological, for which they started in great glee, laden with an ample supply of sandwiches, &c., for their own dinner, and fully intending to add their contribution to that of every bird, beast, and fish they would have permission to feed during the "long day" they expected to spend in the amusement.

Their departure left me alone with Christine, for the first time for four-and-twenty hours, and though she had much to say about Godfrey's looks, Godfrey's plans and prospects, and all he had said about the boys, &c., she also had a curiosity to gratify concerning my meeting with Hugh, who, as she now understood, was the "handsome gentleman" nurse and Coulson had been talking of, and Philip had so unceremoniously called her to the balcony to look at.

I could see that this unexpected meeting had set her imagination at work; and, in spite of her knowledge of Godfrey's prejudices, and of many things I said to stop the progress of her fancy, I plainly perceived that castle-building on my account had already begun, and that it was only out of regard for my feelings that she refrained from pursuing the theme aloud.

In the afternoon, I did a little shopping with her, after which she went to pay her daily visit at her sister's, where I left her; and, returning alone (as I usually did on such occasions), I saw Hugh Wyndham on the steps of his mother's house, as I approached those of ours.

He ran down and shook hands with me, saying:—

“I know your brother's come, for I saw him with you on the balcony last night from a peeping-hole I have; is he going to whisk you off to-morrow?”

“Not quite to-morrow; we shall hardly leave this within a week, I suspect.”

“Then I shall see you again, as I had reckoned on,” said he, as we parted.

Godfrey and the boys were not expected till after the nursery tea was over; so it had been settled beforehand that they should join us in that sort of nondescript meal,

half dinner, half tea, which goes by so many different names, but which is often found convenient in a family (like ours) slenderly provided with attendance.

For this, however, the zoological party arrived in good time; but when it was over, and when it appeared that the spirits of the young gentlemen were "getting too much for them," and menaced destruction either to Mrs. Bertha's furniture, or to the peace of the family, or both together, Godfrey was forced to quiet them with the promise of a story, "if they would be good," and the threat of instant dismissal to bed, if they continued to be riotous.

They came to their senses in a moment, and every noise was hushed as their father began recounting to them some of the various wonders of the distant seas and lands he had traversed or visited, with that surpassing life and truth in which the

spoken narrative of an observant and intelligent man has always such an advantage over a written account, however clear and well expressed.

I had never, since the days of my childhood, seen Godfrey's own face so agreeably animated as while he read in Philip's and Arthur's the eager curiosity of the elder, the wondering interest of the younger, as they listened with breathless attention to tales of which sometimes a friend of their father's, sometimes their father himself, was the hero; while Christine and I lent an equally pleased, if a less astonished, ear to a discourse containing so much more of personal adventure than my brother was habitually given to relate.

When the story-telling was over, the children gone to bed, and Christine out of the room for the purpose of giving some di-

rections about them, Godfrey and I remained alone in the rapidly darkening apartment; he rose from his place near the window, and seated himself beside me on the little sofa, repeating again, as he drew me closer to him, what he had said at the moment of his arrival, "that he was indeed happy to find himself encircled by all he loved."

"I hope it's not selfish," continued he, after a pause, "to like so very much to have you with us, when you might fill a different place with more advantage (for there's many an honest fellow, Swithy, would be the better every way for having you to look to, when he comes into port), but so it is. I *do* like having you here; and, as I said before, I am, on the whole, a very happy man, with so much to be thankful for that I hardly know, whatever I have thought at times, that I

have any such great loss in Blendon, which will, and must be Philip's, at all events, if he lives; so that if I am not rich myself, yet I need not have any fear of my children's being poor."

"You have everything that the possession of Blendon could *not* give to its last owner," replied I, "and your knowing and being thankful for your happiness are helps to its being lasting."

"I hope you are right," said he; "I dare say you are; I know you like to see me contented; there you are right again, and it goes a great way to make me so, Swithy, to find you and Christine what you are to each other."

My sister-in-law re-entered the room as Godfrey finished speaking, and the conversation turned upon other subjects; but I went to bed that night under the tranquilizing impression that he *had* con-

siderably cooled down from the vengeful ardour which had possessed him when he left England. I did not indeed attribute that subsiding of his feverish eagerness to a Christian victory over himself (for I saw in his request that I should not introduce Hugh Wyndham to Christine, a visible token of the reverse). I ascribed it rather to an utter and increasing hopelessness of obtaining the means whereby to fulfil his soul's desire. I knew it was most doubtful, even if chance ever were to bring him and Hugh Wyndham together under favourable circumstances, whether he could, biassed as he was, do justice to the amiable qualities and frank, disinterested character of one he only looked on as his enemy's nearest kinsman. It was, in fact, of no great importance, as regarded myself, whether he did or not; but still, I hated injustice, and hated it most when forming

a disagreeably contrasting point in the mental constitution of one of the justest and fairest of men ; and it would have pleased me to have been able to look forward to the possibility of that single spot in the nobleness of my brother's nature being one day effaced.

Next morning, when I went in to breakfast, the first thing I heard was Christine's exclaiming, in as vexed a tone as ever came from her lips "that Godfrey was going into Cheshire, to Captain Stirling's, on some horrid engineering business, which might keep him no one knew how long, and that we were to wait for him where we were, as he had not half done his London business ; so we might have to stay the whole summer in town !"

"You can't be more sorry than I, dearest," said he, gravely ; "but it was a promise between me and Stirling that I

should go down when he wanted me, to give him my help in what he has in hand; it can't be done by letter, and so, though I should have been better pleased if the summons had come after I had done everything here, and settled you at Weymouth, I can't go back from my word, for if I don't meet the people he wants me to meet *now*, it's a chance if I can ever. It is very provoking, but can't be helped; it annoys me that you should lose your summer so, and if you would prefer going without me to—"

"Oh, no, no!" cried Christine. "I shouldn't at all. Besides that, it is less expensive to stay here, and the children are really quite well;—only it's *very* disappointing."

"That it most certainly is," returned my brother; "but, since I *have* got the letter this morning, I must see and be down there by night,—the earlier I start the sooner I'm

back. I must be at Euston Square by half-past eleven."

These words sounded the first note, as it were, of the bustle which reigned in the house from that moment, till his departure.

I saw little of him for the remaining two hours; but he came behind me while I was writing directions for his luggage in the dining-room, and said in a low voice:—

"I am correct in thinking, am I not, Swithy, that this Wyndham next door, of whom I hear from Christine that he is now a widower, never sought, himself, whatever the *other* purposed, to engage your affections?"

"Quite correct, brother," replied I, without lifting my head from over my writing.

"Then all's right," said he, as he walked away to give some order, without waiting for, or seeming to wish for any rejoinder.

The cab was presently at the door.

He kissed us all hastily and rushed into the vehicle, calling out to his wife that he might be back in three days, might not for a fortnight, but she should hear from him by the day after to-morrow's post.

That evening, as I watered the geraniums, I was startled by a voice close to me, and on looking round, saw Hugh Wyndham, just divided from me by the bars that separated Mrs. Pringle's from Mrs. Elliott's balcony.

"I saw your brother drive off this morning," said he; "when do you follow him?"

"I don't know," replied I; "he may come and fetch us very soon, but we may, by possibility, spend this whole month here."

"The whole month!" cried he. "Twenty-eight days of it remain, and out of those I think fourteen at least must, or ought, to be devoted to duck-feeding. How glad I am!"

With this expression of Hugh's satisfaction, our colloquy ended, for at that moment Christine appeared beside me, and he retreated into his mother's drawing-room.

CHAPTER IX.

GODFREY did *not* come back in three days, which was a terrible trial to Christine, who frankly avowed that she had never been so tantalized in her life as by her husband's returning in this way, only to leave her again in two days.

It was the more tantalizing, as the length of his visit in Cheshire seemed indefinite, and she was always "hoping to see Godfrey" by Thursday, Friday, or "the beginning of next week," and then the same story over again.

The constantly recurring disappointment was even more tormenting than the thing itself; but she bore it—as she always bore every vexation I ever saw her exposed to—with the greatest sweetness.

“The time will come to an end at last,” said she; “so I must make the best of it; and as to the boys, and my wishing to get them to the sea-side, when I told Philip yesterday that we should stay here a week longer, unless his papà could be back to fetch us before, he candidly said, ‘he hoped papà would not come, he liked so to feed the ducks.’ Not a very dutiful speech, certainly; the child was crazy to see his father the other day, and now he decidedly prefers to see the ducks.”

I believe that poor Philip, who was in truth a very affectionate child, though he expressed his passing feelings in that unvarnished way

which is proper to all children who have not been tutored out of their honesty, did in reality love his father something better than the ducks, though he was so very fond of feeding them; but, however that may have been, it is certain that he and I, with or without Arthur, spent many of our mornings in this, his favourite pastime, and that on those expeditions we were generally joined by Hugh Wyndham.

He sometimes accompanied us from our door, but more often waited for us, seated on some bench, or leaning against some tree, on our way towards the piece of water, which continued to be, in the eyes of the two children, the fountain of delight, that afforded them the chief pleasure of their London day.

Our friend Hugh sometimes brought his share of biscuit, and besides keeping off certain greedy drakes and ganders, "who had

no business to gobble up what was meant for the ducklings," took so active a part in the distribution, as to show by his real enjoyment of the sport, how young in spirit and frame he remained in spite of past sorrow, and at the same time to ensure himself a great amount of popularity with the little boys, who told their mother with perfect simplicity, "that no other grown-up gentleman, except papa, ever was so fond of play."

Christine smiled rather slyly as she listened to them, but did her best to conceal her evident impression that there was something of much more importance than mere duck-feeding attending these walking parties; while I, without pretending to perceive her suspicions, endeavoured to dispel them by telling her the plain truth, namely, that after my first interview with Hugh Wyndham (of which I had given her a

detailed account), the conversations I had with him, though friendly and agreeable, were not in the least what she, or the world in general, would have denominated "interesting."

They ranged over a variety of subjects, only occasionally connected with what might bear personally on him or myself, and our talk so rarely deviated from the common tone of familiar intercourse into that of deeper sympathy and more confiding friendship, that I had nothing to warn me of having been either mistaken or dissembling when I had confirmed my brother's impression on the day he left us.

Not that I supposed Hugh Wyndham *literally* joined me for the mere satisfaction of feeding the water-fowl and romping with my nephews (though I verily believe he took pleasure in both those things); but I considered that his resi-

dence with his mother in London, at that time of year, was wearisome to him, though he, for sundry reasons, resigned himself to it as a duty; and I thought the tedium of his daily life accounted sufficiently for his seeking to spend what hour she could in my company. I thought, too, that the extreme frankness of his disposition, and his certainty of not being misinterpreted by me, prevented his ever dreaming of putting restraint on the expressions of his satisfaction at "having at least secured two hours of pleasant walk and talk in a dull day," when he met us near the Victoria Gate, or caught us up as we pursued our way towards the accustomed end of our pilgrimage.

A week, ten days, a fortnight, slipped away in this manner; the day of Godfrey's return was still undecided; so were our movements; so was the continuance

of our morning walks. I thought them a great pleasure; but I ought not, I knew, to desire that pleasure to be too much prolonged, seeing that I also knew *myself* well enough to be conscious that, if that renewal of old ties were carried on much farther, neither my conviction of *his* brother's crimes, nor of *my* brother's settled purpose, could stand pledge for the durable steadiness and soberness of my mind; and I was aware that, if I listened much longer to the warm expressions of Hugh's friendship, I should begin to form conjectures whether, under this or that circumstance, with this or that opportunity, such friendship might not be lighted up into a love like that he had once bestowed upon Rosa.

As it was, I needed to tell myself every day that, though he had not yet, as I had expected, formed any new attachment

to fill the void left in his heart by the loss of his wife, still he was no more in love with me than in her life time, notwithstanding that he valued and desired my company, even as he had done when betrothed to her.

I had not deceived myself in those days; I had felt and understood exactly what I was to him, even when he had told me that "I interested him more than any other creature;" he was eager and enthusiastic in speech then, he was eager and enthusiastic in speech now. I was what I *had* been to him—no more; to think otherwise would be a delusion, into which those might fall who knew him less thoroughly—but *I*, never!

I was resolved I would not fancy what I saw Christine was always fancying, when she found that my evening watering of the geraniums was almost invariably a

signal for some one else to appear upon the next balcony, either to "wonder that London plants should be so long-lived," or else to observe upon what promise the sky gave for to-morrow's walk. She would not, I thought, have calculated, as I perceived she was doing, had she known either his impatience of solitude, or his little aptness to consider what "the neighbours" (supposing there had been any left) would observe.

Another week came and went in the same sort of uncertainty as regarded Godfrey ; of Hugh we saw nothing during the latter part of it, because, as he had told me, with a look of considerable vexation, he had been obliged to go down to Berkshire to his sister, Mrs. Holland's, "to enjoy a business talk."

But, on the evening of the third day from his departure, before either my nephews

or I had noticed any token of his return, he was on his balcony the instant I went out with my watering-pot, greeting me with even more than his usual friendliness, and telling me how glad he was to find me as usual "at my evening task," and how he had lived for the last three days "in such dread of finding us flown!"

"And for how long *are* you here?" continued he. "There are so many posts from the country now! I hope none of them has brought a summons, involving your immediate transportation to the ends of the earth?"

I told him we had had no letter from Godfrey that day, and were consequently as much in the dark as ever regarding the precise time of his return.

"Then, it's all just as it was, and I dare say you will be here for another fortnight? What a reprieve!"

I was wanted for something in the house, and Christine's voice called me, but, ere I left the balcony, I had seen such a look of sparkling gladness succeed to the anxious expression with which Hugh had asked "for how long we were here?" that a doubt shot through my heart, and I considered for a moment or two whether, if Godfrey were to put me *that question* over again, I could answer it with as clear a conscience as before? The doubt was soon dismissed as a vain deception; but it warned me of coming peril; it made me fear for the permanence of that peace I had been so long in regaining; and when the next morning's post did bring the news that we were certainly to expect Godfrey within the next three days, I judged, by the pain with which I received the intelligence, that "it was so best."

CHAPTER X.

I WENT out with the boys as usual, not feeling absolutely sure that we should have Hugh's company; for I had been called away from the balcony the evening before, ere he had had time to say, as he generally did, "No impediments to our walk to-morrow?"

But there he was, waiting for us, though not, I thought, with his wonted cheerful aspect; on the contrary, it appeared to me that I could trace more of care on his

brow than I had noticed on it since the day when we first met, and when he had poured forth his sorrows and his regrets. He joined us, and as the boys ran on before—we following at our accustomed pace—I wound myself up to say, in as indifferent a tone as I could assume, how shortly I expected my brother's return. He had made so sure, the evening before, of our being "stationary for another fortnight," that I reckoned upon some vehement expressions of disappointment; but, contrary to his usual habit, he received my information in silence, only looking very grave, and walking on beside me without our exchanging a word, till he at last said, abruptly:—

"Well, I suppose you will be gone in a week! I wonder what is to become of me then!"

"You will be soon crossing the sea

again to join your regiment, will you not?" said I, with an effort at carelessness.

"I may," replied he; "but that depends on many things. I *may* remain permanently in England. Is that a disagreeable surprise to you?" added he, noticing, perhaps, the slight start with which I heard of this possibility.

I did not know how to reply; I saw he thought I had said—or looked, rather—something ungracious, and I dreaded to hear him express feelings over which *he* had no cause to cast a veil, while mine, complicated and bound up with humiliating recollections, threatened every moment to so overpower me, that, catching at the first words that came to my lips, I said as gaily as I could:—

"Why should you fancy it a disagreeable surprise? Old friends, who depend upon chance for seeing each other, are more likely

to meet when in the same country,—are they not ? ”

“ Not much the more for that, as things stand,” returned he, almost sullenly. “ Captain Lee is not more likely to ask me to Tynteford from here, than from Malta or Gibraltar,—is he ? ”

I could not say I thought he was, and in my confusion stammered out something about “ there being other chances.”

“ One can’t live upon chances though, for all they have served me pretty well this summer, to be sure.”

“ Perhaps they will again,” replied I, braced up for the moment to act my part with the lively confidence best fitted to divert my companion from saying more than I could bear to listen to, if I would control my inward emotion.

“ One can’t build on ‘ perhaps’s,’ either,” observed he, for him, quite sharply.

"One ought not, I suppose, in strict wisdom," said I; "but one can't help it, when one would be glad of what they might bring."

"Then you would be glad, Alswitha, if chance settled you next door your old friend again?"

"I could not well be sorry," replied I.

"We have had some pleasant walks and talks," said he, somewhat mournfully.

"We shall have a few more yet," returned I, in a voice I tried in vain to render steady.

"A few more!—what's a few? Three at the outside, perhaps!—and then a parting! Isn't that a horrid thing?"

There was a something in these words that pierced my heart, for I did *not* believe in my own assumption that we were sure to meet again; and though I tried to answer in a half playful strain, I was so suddenly and heavily weighed down by the reality and near

approach of a parting, which causes he knew not of might well render a "parting for ever," that I failed completely in my attempt, losing command of my voice, and choking for want of breath.

Hugh Wyndham gazed at me with a look of unspeakable interest and affection.

"You and I can't part, Alswitha; and why should we?"

"We ought never to have met!" I panted out, struggling to withdraw my hand, which he let go with a look of astonishment, as he took in my words, and said "that he regretted his mistake, and should no longer intrude on me."

"For Heaven's sake, Hugh, don't leave me—don't leave me in anger!" cried I, as he was turning from me.

"Why should I stay to make a fool of myself? You won't have me, and there's no more to be said."

"But you were not mistaken in thinking I hate to part from you," exclaimed I, heeding nothing but the misery of being thought cold and capricious by him.

"Then," said he, as the look of offended feeling passed away from his countenance, though it still retained a sort of puzzled expression, "then I must have mistaken what you said afterwards; for if you felt our parting as you say, you couldn't regret our meeting; how should you? What was it you meant, Alswitha dearest?"

"I meant"—it rushed upon me now that I could not say what I meant; and in the hurry and helplessness of the moment I asked, "Why we should not go on henceforward as we had done hitherto, the best of friends, and happy in our friendship?"

"Because, dear girl, it's only by putting it out of the power of men or fate to part us while we live, that we *can* go on enjoying

each other's friendship, as no doubt we might do to *your* heart's content, at least," added he with a smile, "if your brother took Mrs. Elliott's house, and my mother Mrs. Pringle's, each for a twenty-one years' lease; but you see how likely that is! So, if you *do* mind parting half as much as I do, and would spare me and yourself such unnecessary pain, just sit down there, on our usual seat, while the boys are at the water's edge, and say the one word which will settle all between us!"

"Oh, Hugh! where are you dragging me?" said I, as I sank on the rustic seat we habitually occupied, while the boys pursued their amusements.

"I don't want to *drag* you anywhere," replied he, smiling anew, as he placed himself beside me. "I only want to *lead* you to where you might perhaps have found yourself years ago, if you had not been so perversely

determined that your name should never be Wyndham !”

A cold chill crept over me as he concluded his gay speech, and I said in a smothered tone, while faintly striving to draw my hand out of his,—“ You don’t know what you ask of me !”

“ I know perfectly well,” returned he ; “ I am asking for the only reasonable security that can be given for our ever having another week—another day—of the happy companionship you say you value ! A boy and girl might fancy it, but a man and woman, such as you and I are become, with the knowledge of the world and its chances that each has acquired, must feel, without much depth of reflection, that there is but one sure way to retain the liberty of enjoying one another’s company and attachment. When we wandered about Bampton Chase together, you lived in a sort of

poetically exalted world of the imagination, and I, engrossed by hopes of my own, without which I should, beyond a doubt, have loved you then—not merely as I *did* love you—but as I do now!”

“So you do love me!” murmured I, involuntarily betraying the joy which stirred my heart in spite of my will.

“Does it surprise you?—do you doubt it?” continued he, as I turned away my head, too conscious of having allowed my feelings to escape me to bear to meet his eyes. “I can’t understand you, Alswitha; I believe you to be less capable of coquetry than any woman I ever knew! And yet—either your manner has deceived me, or else you are hampered by some entanglement I know nothing of, which makes you wretched, and which you will not explain. Tell me clearly how it is, and you may be sure,” added he, with a tinge of

haughtiness in his tone, "that I shall not press myself, either on an engaged woman, or on one who—though professing herself my friend—dislikes giving the one proof she can of caring for me."

"I am not engaged," replied I.

"Then, if you are not, and if you love me as I love you, why draw back your hand and shed tears, when you could make me and yourself happy?"

Unable to declare the naked truth, I answered with effort "that I could not endure quarrelling with Godfrey."

"And would that necessarily follow on your marrying me?" asked Hugh.

"I can scarcely hope otherwise," answered I.

"If you were Captain Lee's daughter," said he, slightly reddening, "I should feel the force of such an objection; but it is a very despotic *brother* who quarrels with

his only sister, because she consults her own taste rather than his, in uniting herself to a man whom he has no right to view as his or her inferior in birth or reputation. I know he hates Owen, and, it may be, with cause; but if he is just and high-minded, as you have represented him to me, it is difficult to imagine—though I comprehend his being better pleased by another choice—that he should take that kind of offence, which should weigh in the scale against what you allow me to hope would be for your happiness as well as mine.”

“He *is* just, he *is* high-minded,” said I, trembling; “but he has had reason, thought he had reason, to believe I shared all his feelings; and I should be in his eyes but a degenerate branch of his house, fit only to be broken off and cast aside, from the moment that he discovered—that he suspected,—my—my—”

"Returning the love of Owen's brother? It is that, is it? But *do* you love me, Alswitha? For, by Heaven, I think so one minute, and doubt it the next! You sob as if your heart would break when I express that doubt, and yet you won't say the frank word that would put an end to it. I don't know you; you are not behaving like yourself!"

"I have grown unlike my former self, and can't help it," said I, mournfully.

"Answer me one question, however," persisted he, as we rose to return on our slow progress homewards, "and I shall be satisfied; supposing you were still living with your mother and Owen, supposing you had never left them to live with your brother, and were now situated just as when you and I parted in Eaton Square, would you have these doubts and scruples? Or would you show a little

gratitude to one who loves you, at least as much as Godfrey Lee can?"

"I should not be ungrateful. No! I *am* not ungrateful, if you would only believe it," answered I, raising my eyes imploringly to his.

"I can't help believing you," replied he, taking my hand as he spoke, "and I will spare nothing now to win you; but you must assist me and yourself, and not yield to this weakness. You are your own mistress, and can act as seems good in your own eyes."

"But can't you understand, Hugh, that having left my mother's house for his, my brother's opinions, though they do not convince, must influence me a good deal? It may be weakness, but—"

"You had strength of mind enough," interrupted he bitterly, "to quarrel with your mother because you hated Owen,

though you can't offend your brother because you love me!"

"If it were but that only," ejaculated I, despairingly.

"Why, what else is it?—you have said you are not engaged, or entangled in any way? Or are the difficulties that alarm you, after all, of a nature *unconnected* with Owen and with your brother? You gave me the impression that there were no others."

"And there are no others," answered I, distinctly.

"Then, my dear Alswitha," if you will only calm yourself, and get back a little of your old nerve, we shall overcome them between us! Trust me for doing my part," added he, his countenance brightening so joyfully that the sight of it encouraged me to hope, in spite of all I knew, and I smiled as I answered:—

"Oh, I *do* trust you for that, but—"

“Let me hear no ‘buts’ just now,” he broke in, gaily. “You must let me manage for you. That there is an awkwardness, I comprehend, perhaps a considerable one, which is why I can’t help regretting your leaving your old home, where the business would have been simple. But it’s no use going back upon the past, and I must think of what is to be done in the first instance, as soon as I can think rationally; for when I joined you this morning I hadn’t a notion of coming out with all this, though I had asked myself, more than once, whether you might not, perhaps, hate the prospect of our walks coming to an end as much as I did! Giving them up is not to be thought of at this time of day, without an equivalent; is it, Alswitha?”

I sighed deeply as he pressed my hand in concluding this speech; and, fairly over-

come by his vehement earnestness and my own mingled feelings, I allowed him to run on without interruption. He told me how his meeting with me, a month ago, had been the first real pleasure he had known for ages ; how, every time I had mentioned a probable day for my brother's return from Cheshire, and my consequent leaving London, he had felt terror-struck at the threatened separation, and, finally, how he had been held back from deliberately proposing the expedient he was now urging, by an impression of the uselessness of so doing, till something—he could not describe what—had made him guess he might perhaps be, after all, a luckier fellow than he had supposed.

While he thus dilated with the diffuseness of overflowing happiness on the manner in which his old friendship had glowed into a stronger and warmer flame, I

greedily drank in his words, and felt my inmost heart swell with a delight, which not all my terrible consciousness of what stood between Hugh Wyndham and me could thoroughly extinguish. A hope darted into my soul, too, that perhaps, if I had the courage to become Hugh's wife before Godfrey had had time to busy himself with any investigations of a kind tending to bring my stepfather's crimes home to him, he might, seeing me actually united to the younger brother, conceive some reluctance to laying a charge of murder upon the elder. It was true, he might take pride in despising all such considerations; so much I knew; but I believed he loved me, and thought it, therefore, possible he might be inclined to view the undertaking I dreaded his setting on foot, less in the light of a positive duty, when it was plain that the blight it must cast on a whole

family would spread over me and mine. If Godfrey could be brought really to know Hugh, and Hugh could be persuaded not to insist on my seeing his brother (with whom, however, I knew that he had been reconciled in Paris by his mother's wish), if these things could happen (and, but for my perverse fate, why should they not?) the mistakes and misfortunes of my past life would be remedied; the guilty pair, whose actions had so darkly influenced my lot, would be left—as I wished them to be—*literally* to the judgment of God; and my existence, spent by the side of one so deservedly dear to me, would flow on—so far as human foresight could reckon—under circumstances as favourable to contentment and serenity of mind as those of my early years had been the reverse.

These thoughts, which shot rapidly through my mind while Hugh spoke,

wrought such a wonderful change in my views and feelings that, by the time we were approaching our respective homes, tears no longer filled my eyes, and I was able to break the moody silence in which I had at first listened. But sensible still of the difficulties, though not at the moment absolutely crushed by my knowledge of them, I expressed envy of my companion's light-heartedness, which enabled him to look so boldly and cheerfully, through a whole vista of strife and hindrances, to a blissful region beyond!

“Do you envy me, dearest?” he said. “I should be ill off without the power of seeing light gleam through the cloud; you will see it as well as I, when you have once learnt to live in a happy present, instead of in an unhappy past, or in a doubtful future! You have not been so placed as to see much of the ‘*bright*’ side

of nature' hitherto! No wonder that things strike you gloomily! But if you love me, Alswitha, try and hope! Hope for my sake, and your own!"

"I will try—must try!" was my answer, "for you have a right to claim so much from me; yet, if you knew what there is to break through—to struggle with!"—and the remembrances of Blendon Hall, laying hold on me afresh, stopped my tongue, and checked my hope.

"I believe you! I know it," said he (fancying I alluded to my brother's prejudices), "but harder things have been done, and if you are but true to me, and your brother sees it, you will be able, depend on it, to make me happy, without irreparably breaking with him, which I should be very sorry for on your account. Only we must really think of measures; and tell me first, is that interesting-looking

little woman, your sister-in-law, completely swayed by her husband's prejudices, or might she help us in need?"

"She is not in *all* points led by his opinions; in fact she is, so far as one person can be towards another who is only known by sight and name, disposed to like and think well of you."

"How kind of her! I was sure she was amiable!" cried he, enthusiastically.

"But," proceeded I, "there is nothing I should so much dislike and scruple to do, as to endeavour to work on her good-nature to do what might—"

"Get her into a scrape with your brother?" interrupted Hugh. "I wouldn't attempt it for the world! But, for all that, I see no reason why she shouldn't be enlisted on our side; and there she is, looking as if she desired no better," added he, as he caught sight of Chris-

tine on the balcony, watching with little Alswitha for my return and that of the boys.

She did look most benevolently down upon us; Hugh bowed to her as he perceived her eye rest on him, and she returned the salutation with a courtesy and graciousness which showed *me* that she guessed he and I "understood each other," and emboldened *him* for the first time to hasten up the doorsteps with me into our hall.

"Actually within the entrenchments!" cried he; "but I must go farther now, and get introduced to that dear, good little vice-queen of the enemy's city, by way of finishing this morning's work."

"It won't finish it," said I, looking gravely round to him on the landing-place, whither he had followed me.

"But if it helps, that's something, is it

not? You won't turn me back now, Alswitha?"

I couldn't turn him back—turn him out—and he walked with me into the drawing-room, where my sister-in-law came forward to meet him with extended hand, listening with so kind a smile to his playful apologies for "forcing an entrance," and showing by her manner, as well as words, so much "pleasure in making his acquaintance," as to put it in his power to slip at once, and without gradations, from the merest exchange of introductory phrases, into discussion of the most personally interesting topics.

"It is *very* kind of you, Mrs. Lee," he said, "to be glad—as you say you are—to make my acquaintance, but, do you know, it is only fair too, for I have been very desirous to make yours! Partly, on rather selfish grounds perhaps, but I

hear you are so good-natured—see it, too—that I am the less afraid to tell you, at once, how much I want to have a friend in you!”

Christine answered kindly, but with a somewhat surprised look, that “he might be sure to find one in her,” “but *that*,” added she, looking towards me, “is so much in the natural course of things, that you need hardly beg so humbly, Captain Wyndham, for what is sure to be yours.”

I felt I could no longer endure either to stand by, pretending to misunderstand what was passing, or to take part, as one interested, in discussing what really involved so much that was totally unknown to both Christine and Hugh; and I left the room, saying as I passed by him:—

“It’s all vain and hopeless, I know!”

CHAPTER XI.

I TOOK refuge in my own apartment, where I remained for what seemed to me the space of several hours, but amounted, in fact, to little more than one, which my troubled thoughts and conflicting desires stretched to so painful a length as apparently to double the actual time spent in that unquiet solitude.

I reproached myself for everything I had done and not done that morning ; for betraying my feelings, for folly and weakness in letting Hugh into the house, for dis-

courtesy and ingratitude in not welcoming him to it! I held both hands awhile to my temples, feeling as if they were ready to burst with the rapid tide that rushed through their throbbing veins; I strove to question my own soul as to its wish and aims, and I sought to determine whether my conscience must needs condemn them, or whether the agony they caused me proceeded from the mere dread of my brother's rebukes. I hoped it was the latter; for, if it were so, then I was clearly right in wishing beyond everything to pass my days with Hugh, with whom life would be, I thought, almost too happy for the conditions of mortality! Could I but drink a draught of the waters of oblivion! But there was no such draught for me; I saw my father's murderer in Hugh Wyndham's brother, and I knew not how, without betraying the horrible secret, to make it a condition of my

marriage with Hugh, that I was never to be expected so much as to look upon Owen. Still, the more I grew used to the notion of being indeed beloved by him whom I prized above all men, the less I could look on it as a possible thing to reject—to appear to scorn—what I returned so heartily. If I might tell him the truth, then, I thought, I could bear to part from him; he would pity and forgive me, I doubted not; but to be ungrateful in his eyes!—I could not endure the thought; I had suffered enough that morning through momentarily appearing so. I would not and could not repent of having quitted Owen Wyndham's roof; but how shut my understanding to the perception that if I had resigned myself to dwell somewhat longer beneath it, I should be now quitting that detested home for a happy and permanent one, without having penetrated, without the chance of ever penetrating, the fatal mystery that

was now poisoning all that ought to have filled my soul with unmixed delight? And amid this labyrinth, it was I who, on my own judgment, even as at my own risk, was to choose the right, the least wrong path. I had once coveted freedom of action; it now struck my mind as nothing but a snare and a peril. I fancied that I should have been thankful for whatsoever event might have forced my decision either way. I wished—I believe I prayed, in my folly and presumption—for a sign from heaven that should indicate the course I might best take! But nothing from without or from within as yet seemed to offer me guidance, and the whirl of my thoughts adding rapidity to the thick beatings of my heart, I was growing every moment less capable of restraining the emotion that shook my whole frame, when the loud closing of the street-door, and then Hugh's gay whistle in the open air, as he ran from

one house into the other, told me that his conference with Christine was at last over. I next heard her footstep on the stairs, and in a moment she was in my room, kissing and congratulating me with the kindest warmth.

“My dearest Christine,” said I, with as much composure as I could assume, “your good wishes ought to carry good luck with them; but surely you cannot regard this matter as fixed, as certain?”

“Nothing of the sort is *absolutely* certain,” answered she, smiling, “till the ring is on your finger; but, short of that, may one not reckon pretty securely on how the present business is to terminate, you being of age and independent, and he being what he is?”

“You like him, then?”

“More than I can tell you.”

“I am glad of it, come what may,” returned I.

“You say that in a very mournful tone,

Alswitha! How could you doubt my liking one so unaffected and pleasing, one so warmly attached to you?—one, moreover,” proceeded she, with an arch look, “whom I had marked out and chosen for you nearly a year and a half back, when you showed me that affectionate answer of his to your letter of condolence? From that moment I suspected, and I *now* perfectly understand how it could be, that—without your being, of course, the least conscious of it—the true cause of your not caring to please the people you met, was your comparing them disadvantageously with the one man you had happened to know intimately, engaged though he was to another girl. Don’t you think yourself there might be something in that?”

At a less perturbed moment I believe it would have been impossible for me to refrain from smiling at the mingled sharp-

ness and narrowness of perception which had thus brought my dear sister-in-law so near the truth, without permitting her fully to reach it ; but as it was, I had no difficulty, and I remained silent, till Christine began exclaiming against the melancholy fashion in which I sat brooding over prospects which promised every happiness—which it seemed quite unthankful not to appreciate.

“Oh, Christine, I *do* appreciate—appreciate only too well—the happiness of being chosen by Hugh Wyndham ; but have you forgotten Godfrey and his feelings ?”

“No, Alswitha, I have not, and I know he will not be pleased at first. It is, as I have said before, his one fault to be over strong in his prejudices against the whole kith and kin of people whom he has reason to think badly of ; but you must know him much less well than I, if you can

believe him likely to be permanently affected in his feelings towards you, through your valuing such a young man as this Hugh Wyndham as he deserves ; for he would never, if he had talked with him as I have just now, again call him ‘an empty dandy ;’ and I know no one more ready to admit candidly that he has been mistaken than my husband is, when he finds reason to change his opinion.”

Up to that day—up to that moment almost—I had been thankful to Godfrey for his decision “that it was better” not to burden his wife’s mind with the discoveries made at Blendon ; but now the sense of shame, which had made me rejoice in Christine’s comparative ignorance of the deeds done in our family, was swallowed up in the desire to pour forth the whole of those scruples and fears, which, to one who knew not their grounds, might well appear overstrained and visionary.

But I had solemnly pledged my word, and I would not break it; so I merely observed "that what she said was quite true in general; but that Godfrey never *would* sit down kindly and good-humoredly to such a talk with Hugh as she had just had!"

"I trust that we shall make him, between us!" said she, with her most encouraging look.

I shook my head, while pressing her hand in token of my sense of her kindness; and it was all I could do to keep my promise, and refrain from telling her why and what I feared. Still, it soothed me to perceive how much pleased she was with Hugh, and I listened, with a faint renewal of hopefulness, to all the reasons she gave me, (weak as I knew them to be!) for being certain "that Godfrey would never become estranged from me for following my own choice, when that choice

was in itself so unexceptionable, although there was, doubtless, a probability that he would say some, and look more, unpleasant things, on first hearing that I was engaged to a Wyndham."

I told her it gave me comfort to see how fully she trusted in the likelihood of a happy issue to what *I* looked on as so uncertain. And in a degree it did so, because I thought Godfrey would acknowledge, in his wife's view of the subject, the probable impression which the world at large would conceive as to the suitability of the proposed connection; for though not *led*, as many are, by the opinion of the multitude, that opinion, I knew, swayed him to some amount. I then learnt from her that Hugh had plainly asked whether there was cause for my excessive dread of determined opposition on my brother's part?—to which question she had replied

much to the effect of what she had since been saying to me, respecting Godfrey's probable mode of feeling and acting on the announcement of the affair.

"I told him honestly," proceeded she, "that I did not think, that if you applied formally to your brother for advice, he would give it for the accepting of this morning's proposal; 'but then,' said I to him, 'Alswitha being three-and-twenty, and having known you so long and so well, is not called on to ask such advice; and when my husband hears the thing is settled, and his sister's happiness bound up in it, I may venture to say he is sure, not only to overcome his prejudices out of a sense of duty and affection for her, but in the end to forget them entirely. 'I can't tell you how his face brightened, and how he begged me to be sure to repeat this to you!—'for,' he added, '*she*

is so oppressed by the notion of having utterly to forfeit her brother's regard, in consequence of confessing to a little for me, that I have as yet scarcely tasted the pleasure it should afford me, from her seeming so convinced it must cost her such painful sacrifices.' I promised to do all I could to cheer you, and to help you, if need were; so I hope, Alswitha, that you will show him I have kept my word, by letting him have, next time you meet, some of that enjoyment which he deserves, and which he will find in seeing you look more happy and hopeful than I found you when I first came in here, for I am glad to see you less depressed now."

"He does deserve it, and I will try. I think you and he are good angels," answered I, as I threw my arms round Christine's neck; "while Godfrey and I are—"

"Don't abuse Godfrey! I let no one do that but myself, once or twice a-year," cried she, playfully; "and as to you, Alswitha, the suddenness of this day's events has frightened and upset you to that degree that you are hardly able to judge yourself or others fairly. When your agitation has subsided, you will see things more as I see them; and, in the meantime, unless you can go to sleep, don't sit any longer by yourself, fancying and fearing everything that's dreadful and unlikely, but come down to the drawing-room with me, and listen quietly to what he was telling me just now about his prospects, and what it is that makes it now possible he should leave the army and stay in England."

I complied mechanically with her proposal, and, when in the drawing-room, learnt from her that Hugh Wyndham had been

lately wished, by his sisters and brothers-in-law, to take on him the office of managing, for his mother, certain landed property in the neighbourhood of her home, which had been, up to that moment, under the care of a person to whom it was no longer thought expedient to entrust the same.

His undertaking this would entail, as a necessary condition, a residence with—or close to—old Mrs. Wyndham, towards whom he was expected (should he agree to the proposal) in a manner to supply the place of the granddaughter whom marriage had just removed from under her roof; and in order duly to perform what would be incumbent on him, in this double capacity of man of business and companion, he would, he knew, be compelled to a life of such exceeding sameness and retirement, that he had doubted whether he was sufficiently

fitted to fulfil its duties, without home interests that should replace those of his profession, and make amends for the loss of more frequent intercourse with the world at large.

I instantly remembered that he had (some days previously to his "run down" to Mrs. Holland's) made some allusion to "plans that were for ever being proposed to him by people who didn't the least understand what might be for his good, or that of others;" but I now perceived that it was a project he might not improbably entertain, with the prospect of marrying, though not one for which he would otherwise choose to relinquish his profession.

"I think," continued Christine, "that he is in an uncomfortable state of doubt about it all; for his family are urging this plan upon him, and he admits that if peace is to go on for ever, his chance of advance-

ment is so very small, that he has little or nothing to say against giving up the army, except that "times might change," and that "he would be vexed to the soul if a war were to break out, just after he had cut himself out of everything." So you see he has not yet pledged himself; but I believe he thought it right—in case it should be laid upon him as an absolute duty—to ask how you would feel about an arrangement which implies, of course, a certain restraint as to choice of residence, and perhaps some other checks on entire freedom of action."

"I should be happy to live wherever he did," said I, with more of listlessness than of warmth; for the secret, but real, clog upon my hopes of happiness so thoroughly outweighed all slighter inconveniences, that I could scarcely perceive—still less heed—such as were now noticed to me.

"Well, Alswitha," continued Christine,

"if you are so fortunately indifferent on that point, do take the very first opportunity of telling him so; for I see that though he will settle nothing against your liking, he expects his family to insist the more on the plan, in consequence of his marrying; which is the reason why he thought himself bound to mention it at once, at the very beginning of your engagement."

"Then he looks on me as decidedly engaged to him?"

"Of course he does! A woman is always engaged to a man she has accepted, unless she herself or her parents break the thing off. You have not changed your mind about Captain Wyndham?"

"Changed!—no; I shall never change!" exclaimed I, glad to see that I was considered to have done an irrevocable deed in showing Hugh my preference, and confirming Christine, by the earnestness of my

speech, in that belief of my love for him, which my vacillating manner had for a moment shaken.

“Dearest Christine! how kind and encouraging you are!” cried I, gratefully, and from that minute I made up my mind, that let Godfrey say and do what he might, I would brave all the displeased astonishment with which he was sure to hear of my “engagement” to the man with whom I had once—in a manner—boasted of shunning all connection.

The expectation of what awaited me was not pleasant; but it was a great thing, nevertheless, to have taken a resolution, even with the consciousness of its probable cost; and my mind thereupon gradually recovered the equilibrium it had all but lost amid the distracting reflections which had bewildered it during the whole forenoon.

My nephews observed at dinner time,

that they were "so glad Captain Wyndham had come inside the house that morning!" They "hoped he would come again, for he could paint pictures, and had promised them a horse soldier each;" and in the course of the afternoon, the balcony being by that time shady, Philip ran into the drawing-room to tell me "*the gentleman* was standing at the end of the balcony next ours, and had asked where I was?"

I did not hesitate, but went out immediately to join him, while Christine good-naturedly kept the children in the drawing-room.

We shook hands across the partition rails, as if to seal the half-ratified treaty of the morning; when he, seeing at once in my face that I was in a more resolute, and therefore less unhappy mood, than when I had left him with Christine, applauded my victory over fanciful scruples,

and congratulated me on my return "to my own courageous nature," for which, he said, "he had admired me from our first meeting of all, and could not understand my losing it at the very time when his whole happiness hung on my firmness and steadiness."

I felt at that moment that, befall what might, it was an easy task to be "firm and steady" in my love to such a one as Hugh; but I saw in his countenance, as it reflected mine, that no words were needed to make my feelings known, and he launched forth, as he gazed on me, into grateful praises of Christine, whom he pronounced to be "the kindest, most cheering, most sympathising creature he had ever known, always excepting you, Alswitha," he continued, as if correcting himself; "for it was the recollection of that generous, unselfish way of yours, of

throwing yourself into your friends' feelings and interests, without one atom of vanity or personal calculation; it was the recollection of such a nature as I had never known in man or woman besides yourself, that made my mind, even then, when I believed it utterly impossible I should ever know happiness again, still instinctively fly over land and sea to the one being who could alone soothe what she alone could fully feel for. I knew you were at your brother's, knew there was no human likelihood of our meeting; but when your letter came, I said to myself 'I was right; she is a true friend; we shall meet again somehow'—and so we have."

As he spoke, the joyful exultation of his tone and voice again so laid hold on me, as to compel me to share, for the moment, all the feelings they betokened; and I was indeed

very happy as I thanked him for valuing in me "what I could not help, what it would have been impossible for me not to feel towards him who from the beginning had shown *me* such frank confidence."

"It is your not being able to help it," replied he eagerly, "that makes me love you so! Perhaps I ought to feel differently, but if I thought all your kindness the effect of charity, and striving to 'do your duty to your neighbour,' I am afraid I should not be half so much obliged to you, as I am through the persuasion that you just did everything that was good and affectionate because it came naturally to you."

I felt myself grow crimson from brow to bosom as he spoke, ashamed of receiving praise I had not, I knew, fairly earned, yet at once too proud and too timid to confess what it was that had made my own will, my own feelings and interests—contrary to my

natural character—merge so completely in those of another.

A wild impulse urged me to avow that “long, long love.” I raised my face to his, and the words were just rushing from my half-opened lips, when a terror, an unspeakable dread of becoming lowered in his opinion, even while I flattered his vanity, checked the rash speech; I cast down my eyes again, and felt them fill with hot tears.

“There! you have got your ‘Fate look’ on now!” cried he, smiling, yet in a tone which betrayed anxiety. “What makes you so fearful of difficulties that Mrs. Lee does not perceive?” continued he, “you who used to be so brave, Alswitha! What can make you so unhappy?”

“What vexed me just now,” said I, glad to speak truth so far as I could, “was thinking how inferior I am in reality to your notion of me, how disappointed you are likely to be in me.”

"You say that because I have confessed too much to you," returned he, rather impatiently.

"Indeed, indeed, Hugh, you are mistaken ; I had quite forgotten *that*."

"Then you must be trying to prepare me for some horrid ill-treatment," answered he playfully, in perfectly recovered good humour, "or you wouldn't be at such pains to tell me you are not what I love you so for being ; if you were a usual Miss, I should think you wanted some fine speeches ! But that's another of the things I love you for ; you don't want fine speeches, and I am not obliged to try and make it out somehow that for all that's come and gone—you were my first love ; though, to be sure, you might have been, if you had liked ; and it might," he added musingly, "have spared us both some wretchedness ; still, since one *must* have a certain amount of misery in one's life, I

can't exactly wish things had gone differently, either looking back, or looking to this present moment, which, come what may afterwards, is a very delightful one, for your countenance is happy and makes me happy; so I'm sure all will and must go rightly!"

"I hope so! I trust so!" cried I clasping my hands in the intensity of my anxiety, "and happen what will, I can belong to no one save you."

"None save me!" he repeated, "why, you *do* already belong to me, I consider; you don't suppose your 'belonging to nobody' would be any good to me, when I want you for myself? and mean to have you too, unless, indeed, you think me, on second thoughts, too bad a bargain to undertake."

"Oh, Hugh, how can you talk so? But I believe I *have* seemed very ungracious, not to say ungrateful—only, pray don't

think me so! And I have forgotten all this time, what I partly came out here in order to say, that all plans for the future are alike to me, and that if you *should* find it your duty to remain near your mother, I shall not care in how much retirement, or in how much subjection to her I am to live, so that I am not to reside in London—you know my reasons—and am only not expected to see your brother Owen again.”

“When you are so ready,” replied he, “to enter into all my views, it would be hard if I insisted on anything disagreeable to you, though I confess it pains me to see how deeply rooted your resentment is; still I will never urge you on that point, albeit I hope to see the day when you will yourself look less bitterly on past events. But Owen has cost me too much already for me to be willing to quarrel with you, dear, about him, although I know my mother

will mind this condition a good deal. That can't be helped, however, and I too must not lose time in saying to you, before some abominable dinner-bell rings, that, from what escaped Mrs. Lee this morning, I am inclined to think you will spare yourself and me a great deal of unnecessary annoyance, by simply telling your brother, when he comes, that you are 'engaged to me,' without letting him think for a moment that there is anything contingent or unsettled about it. You will do that for my sake, won't you, Alswitha, dearest?" asked he, laying hold of my hand, which he seemed to keep in pledge for my compliant answer.

"I will, I will," replied I, hurriedly.

"That's right," said he, gradually relaxing his fingers' hold on mine, but yet retaining them gently; "I will not ask you to come in and see my mother now; it's too late, and both she and you have had

enough for to-day: you of its events, she of its news. Besides, I expect one of my cousins, who dines here, to come in any moment, which puts it out of my power to run in again this evening to Mrs. Lee and you; but to-morrow forenoon (I can't join you on your walk, I'm afraid), I shall come for you as soon as you are back from Kensington Gardens, and bring you in here to be introduced in form. My mother has seen you often, and admires you very much, though she says you look such a 'proud beauty;' she wonders I am not afraid of you. She won't wonder when you are in the room with her, and she sees you as you are when you talk."

"Without my Fate look?" asked I, smiling.

"Oh, that's an awful aspect I had rather you never wore; though, at the same time, I wouldn't part with Wroughton's

sketch for any money; but you look there as if you were punishing yourself for everybody else's sins as well as your own; for both which I consider one *gets* punishment enough without self-infliction. I may come for you to-morrow about eleven, may not I?"

The prospect of being so shortly introduced to Owen Wyndham's mother as her daughter-in-law elect, caused me some inward shuddering; but then she was Hugh's mother, too, and I assented to what was proposed. There was no more "business" to be transacted on either side, but I was still detained on the balcony to hear more and more "last words," which were precious to me from their very needlessness, since they showed how unwillingly Hugh consented to lose one moment 'of my company, and we continued our exchange of "pleasant converse," until first a ring, and

then the opening of a door, announced the arrival of the expected guest, and obliged Hugh to bid me farewell, with a pressure of the hand, as he hastened away to receive his kinsman.

I lingered for some moments on the spot where I had actually tasted of such a cup of happiness, as, mingled though it was, I had never thought to have presented to me. I took a deep breath, as if to assure myself that I was awake and living, not dreaming, or in an unreal world of trance and vision; and then, saying half aloud to myself, "He loves me, and I can and will be his," I returned into the room where Christine sat among the children, with a firmer step and more cheerful countenance than I had shown since I had had to choose between refusing my best beloved, or becoming bound by a fresh tie of affinity to Owen Wyndham.

"It's all right, I see," said my sister-in-law, "you understand each other now, and the rest will follow by degrees, if you can only keep clear of noticing, or complaining of the sort of cold acquiescence which, as well as I can conjecture, will be Godfrey's way of taking your engagement when he hears of it."

I conjectured something very different ; but, being now resolved not to miss such happiness as Heaven was pleased to grant me, through any act of my own, I had already determined not to seek to extort an appearance of approbation from my brother, but to think myself happy if, through steadiness of temper and purpose on my part, as well as through Christine's kindness and gentle influence, I could, by avoiding a quarrel with him at present, retain the hope of being one day forgiven for what I could not but be aware he must now

look on as a contemptible, if not a downright criminal action. My sister-in-law and I talked long and late that evening; I did not expect to sleep at all, so sudden had been the revolution worked in my feelings, views, and prospects; yet now that I was in a measure freed from the notion "that I had no right to happiness in the form offered me, and should therefore never enjoy it," my pulses no longer beat as if wild-fire were flowing through my veins, and, wearied with varied emotions, as if with bodily fatigue, I obtained towards morning some capacity for rest, and slumbered long and heavily.

CHAPTER XII.

Lo! beneath yon palace-gate
Rush th'unwearied hounds of fate,
They that ceaseless, onward still,
Hunt the track of crime and ill!

FROM THE "ELECTRA" OF SOPHOCLES.
(line 1386, and the two following.)

WHEN I awoke, the first feeling I was sensible of was that of having gone through some hard trial, the endurance of which had shaken my whole being, but from which I was now breathing. Gradually I remembered what had passed, and then, in looking forward to what *must* pass within the next day or two, I

strengthened myself to bear my brother's anger by clinging to the thought that I was engaged—betrothed—to Hugh Wyndham, and by the consideration that I had an actual tie, a solemn promise to allege against any attempt Godfrey might make to induce me to change of purpose. Still the thought of his displeasure was dreadful to me, and the more so, as it was no servile terror of what he might do if I offended him, but a deep-seated grief for the loss, or sore diminution, of the esteem and affection entertained for me by a brother whom I continued to love and admire as I had ever done—a brother for whose guidance and protection I had sighed in childhood and early youth, and my feelings towards whom had mainly prompted those two actions that had most influenced my fate—my refusal to become acquainted with Hugh, and my quitting my mother's house. All these reflections vanished, however, when, at about

eleven in the forenoon, Hugh Wyndham ran in from next door to our drawing-room, where I was sitting with Christine, begging me not to fetch my bonnet, but to go with him "just as I was;" "for," added he, laughing, "I particularly want my mother to see your hair; so pray come this minute, without waiting any longer to get frightened at the idea of the introduction."

With all my knowledge of his nature, his state of boyish delight, at his age, and with his "experience of life," rather surprised me; but *he* knew of no black gulf between him and the happiness he promised himself; and perceiving, I suppose, something of the effect his lively manner produced on me, he said, looking with a bright smile from me to Christine:—

"I verily believe Alswitha thinks I ought to study for a 'composed and dignified demeanour;' but it isn't easy to change

our natures, and when I'm happy, I can't help showing it. I hope there's no harm?"

"There is great good," said I, hastening to lay my work aside, "for it would never do if *two* such harsh, gloomy creatures as I am, were to be thrown together."

"I have never found you harsh," cried he, "nor gloomy (except with great cause) till yesterday; and I trust you have been made to see there is no reason for that. Now don't stay to give another look in the glass—your hair is beautiful, I assure you—come along."

I rose to accompany him; but just as he was turning round in the doorway to nod his farewell to Christine, before following me downstairs, a servant from next door came up to the landing-place with a twisted note for Hugh, who, on casting his eyes on its contents, said, in a vexed tone:—

"How provoking! My mother has got one of her spasms, and must put you off. What's worse, too, I can't stay here, for I'm wanted to talk to George Lilburne about some bothering business or other. I'll be back the minute I can—I have no doubt my mother will be better in an hour or two. Good bye! I shall expect a walk with you this afternoon though."

So saying, he flew downstairs and out of the house, leaving me doubtful whether I were most relieved at being spared, for the present, an interview which I looked forward to with a nervous dread, or most annoyed at its being delayed just as I had screwed my courage up to go through with it.

Christine was very sorry; "for," as she observed, "the more actually decisive things I had done, in the way of pledging myself to Hugh and his family, the less Godfrey

would be able to look on the affair as one that could, by any possibility, be retreated from."

I saw, by the importance she attached to this, that she was becoming, on reflection, less sanguine upon the subject than she had been the preceding day; but she continued to talk encouragingly to me, and I believe she felt so on the whole, though she had, by this time, reached a rather stronger perception of the sort of antagonism that existed between the natures of my brother and my suitor, and the consequent risk of their not immediately understanding each other.

Nothing remarkable passed during the remainder of the forenoon; and after our early dinner, I sat expecting Hugh Wyndham to come in—sooner or later—to claim my implied promise of taking a walk with him, when, about half-past four, there

appeared, instead of himself, much such another twisted note as had been brought to *him* in the morning, directed to me. It ran as follows:—

“My Dearest Girl,—

“I suppose it is to punish me for being ‘too happy’ this morning, that I am forced to go out of town in five minutes from hence, to be detained, I know not how long, by anything but pleasant business. I am so glad I spoke out to you yesterday, for I might never have been able else! I don’t know when I may see you; but, come what may, I rely on your keeping faith and truth to

“Your ‘old friend,’

“H. W.

“P.S.—My mother is better than she was, but confined to her room, and unable to see anybody.”

I was disappointed at losing the walk I had been looking forward to with Hugh, and yet more disappointed to find that I was likely to pass several days without seeing him; for it was only in his presence that I was enabled, in some degree, to forget the past in the future, and I feared that, if entirely deprived of the sight of his cheerful confidence, the little I had acquired would utterly vanish, and leave me in the same state of helpless despondency in which I had spent the forenoon of the preceding day. When I had talked over my vexation with Christine however, she helped me to observe that it might perhaps be advantageous that circumstances obliged Hugh to be absent at the very first, while Godfrey was learning, and gradually accustoming himself to the fact of my having engaged myself to a Wyndham.

Christine had certainly a wonderful way

of bringing others, as well as herself, to see the future good that might spring out of a present evil, and I was soon convinced that Hugh's "business" (which we concluded had something to do with the plans he had mentioned the day before) was, probably, though disagreeable, yet well timed. I had need to think it so, for the constant remembrance that each hour, as it passed, was bringing us nearer to that of Godfrey's return, increased my nervous anxiety. There was nothing I was any way *obliged* to do, and I could settle to no voluntary occupation. I should have written to Hugh, but he had not given me his address, nor could his mother's servants, when applied to, tell whither he had gone, though they supposed he was "down in the country with some of the family."

I considered, when daylight came, after

several restless hours spent in bed, that there was now only one day and night to elapse before my dreaded interview with Godfrey; and when breakfast was over, and old Mrs. Wyndham had been duly inquired after, Christine and I sat down to settle our plans for the morrow. Godfrey had mentioned the train he was to come by, so that—as we could thus calculate upon the time of his appearance—we agreed together that *I* should see him first. I should, in this manner, be enabled to tell my own story without delay, or implication of anyone else; and let the first outbreak of his anger be ever so terrible, I should know the worst at the outset, and see at once what I had to strive against.

But I was not destined to witness that first outbreak, whatever it may have been; for my brother returned home a full day

before that he had named, and the door, when he reached it, being already opened for some tradesman, he entered the house without knock or ring to announce him, and walked up to the drawing-room, where Christine was sitting alone. I was in my own apartment, writing to Mrs. Wroughton, and was not aware of any one's arrival, till I heard one of the maids call out to the other, that "master was come, and the dressing-room not ready for him."

I started from my desk, and running downstairs without feeling my feet under me, found myself, I knew not how, in the drawing-room, where my first look at my brother and his wife informed me that my story was told, and that I had now only to listen to the doom about to be passed on me.

Christine's eyes were red, and her cheeks pale, while an expression of anxious fear,

such as I had never before traced in her usually serene countenance, was visible in the glances she now and then stole at her husband, who measured the room with long strides, his features working unquietly, and his brows so closely knit as almost to hide the deep-set orbs, that nevertheless flashed angrily from under their dark lashes.

"So I hear," said he, stopping in his walk as I entered, "that you are engaged—engaged these two days past—to that youngest Wyndham! Is it so, Alswitha?"

"It is, brother," replied I, as steadily as was in my power; "*I am* engaged to Hugh Wyndham."

Godfrey cast on me a look of scorn that withered my very soul, and I sank into a chair as he resumed his exercise, saying, while he paced up and down:—

"Of course I am not going to forbid what I can't hinder; you are your own

mistress, independent in every sense; but I may be permitted to observe that I was never in my life more painfully astonished."

"Godfrey, when you come to know this Hugh Wyndham," began poor Christine, her kindness overcoming her timidity, but she was interrupted by my brother's saying bluntly:—

"I don't mean to know him; what's more, I doubt if he will have any wish to know me, as things stand. Of course he and my sister can do as they please; and had this occurred two or three years ago, when I was told to expect it, and did expect it, I should (though certainly not gratified) neither have been disappointed nor amazed; as I should have thought such a match the natural consequence of her residence under Owen Wyndham's roof, and I had not *then* been told by her own lips, first that she had pur-

posely shunned what might have led to a connection with her step-father's brother, nor subsequently (in a distinct and formal answer to a formal question), that this same brother of her step-father's had never—directly or indirectly—sought to obtain her good graces, in the usual sense of that phrase.”

“And yet you were only told the truth—what was then the truth,” replied I, in an unsteady voice, but audibly.

“So I am to believe,” proceeded he, stepping close up to my seat, and fixing his piercing eyes on mine as he gazed down on me—“I am to believe, am I, that this Hugh Wyndham never, either before or after his engagement to the girl he married, strove to make such impression on you as it is clear he must have made?”

“He had never attempted to make any,” persisted I.

“No?—and yet, knowing what you know,”

(he sank his voice as he uttered these words),
“and previously quite indifferent to him, you have been ready, within less than a month’s renewal of intercourse, to accept him at all risks? Answer me that!”

“Brother, I can’t lie or equivocate to you; I told you the truth then, though not the whole of it (I thought women were not always bound to *that*). Hugh did not, till just now, seek to interest me as you suppose; but I *was* interested without his seeking it, though I knew he was engaged; and I wish I could die, now I have said it.”

Godfrey turned from me, with what look I dared not raise my eyes to see, but I perceived the contemptuous shrug of his shoulders as he walked towards the other end of the room, muttering, though loudly enough for me to hear:—

“Those Wyndhams have it all their own way with women!”

I closed my eyes, and, falling back in my chair, lay there for some moments so utterly motionless, and, I suppose, colourless, that Christine grew alarmed, and I heard her say in a smothered voice:—

“Oh, Godfrey, you will kill her!”

“No, I shall not,” was his answer; “we Lees take more to put us out of the world before our time.”

“You are right, brother,” said I, opening my eyes; “sorrow does not kill us; it only wears us life-long.”

I know not whether he was involuntarily affected by Christine’s terror, or moved by the thought of having too much humbled a spirit naturally as proud as his own, but he drew near me, raised me out of the chair, and strained me to his breast, in an embrace which made me feel the whole might of the tie of blood that bound us. I trembled so in his arms, that he hastened to seat me again,

but it was on the sofa, at a little distance from Christine.

"There is a gulf between you and that man, Alswitha," whispered he, as he placed himself beside me.

"I all but said so to him," replied I, in a tone audible only to him I was addressing; "but, as I could not explain its nature either to him or Christine, I knew not what to urge against all that was pleaded—wishing as I did to be convinced."

"I made a great mistake in keeping the thing from her, and I may thank myself for what has come of it," said he, not without bitterness, but so much more calmly than he had yet spoken, that I began to hope the fire was perhaps burning out, and I asked, timidly, if a connection with one so blameless himself as Hugh, was necessarily a disrespect to our father's memory?—"for," added I, "he has pledged himself not to oblige me ever to see his brother Owen."

“He has! has he?” exclaimed Godfrey aloud; “and that upon the mere ground of your dislike to your stepfather, and so forth? I don’t know whether to call such compliance weakness or good-nature; but it’s yielding a great deal.”

A painful expression contracted his features, as he sat mute for a few seconds, before saying:—

“Your silence was natural; but I wish I had known all I now know, a month back; though I cannot be *sure* that such knowledge would have affected my actions; for the truth is, that the question is not so much now, whether you will or will not marry Hugh Wyndham, but whether Hugh Wyndham, if he be at all that you and Christine represent him, will think for one moment of uniting himself to the sister of the man who is, at this time being, prosecuting his brother Owen for murder!”

At these words Christine shrieked, and I clasped my hands together in speechless horror at what now for the first time flashed on me, namely, that my brother had been passing the time since his return from sea in collecting evidence, preparing proofs of Owen Wyndham's guilt, and that he had succeeded in gathering together such a body of testimony as seemed to him and his advisers sufficient to render a conviction probable.

It was even as I guessed; and a few more words sufficed to explain the state of affairs to my sister-in-law, who, having once understood the case, and once exclaimed, "Oh, Godfrey, if I could feel sure you are right!" sat in silence, with a subduedly sorrowful look, listening to what farther details her husband entered into, which were chiefly addressed to me.

"I regret now," he said gravely, "that I did not write to you, Alswitha, from Cheshire,

where I received the first intimation of a possible clue to the discovery I was anxious to make. But I thought it then so improbable that such a slight link should prove really connected with the great chain of evidence, that I deemed it not worth while to fret you and myself by the discussion of a subject we differed on, when it was so unlikely to produce any consequences whatever. Afterwards, when there appeared more chance of its leading to something, I persuaded myself (rightly too, as far as my knowledge went) that it was better for the peace of our future intercourse to leave you in ignorance of what was passing, till every step was taken, previous to those with which the world at large must be made acquainted. I had not too much, either, of the whole concentrated powers of my understanding, to enable me to go successfully through with what I had taken in hand;

and I did not wish to lose time, or be diverted from my main aim, in answering the repeated objections with which I knew you were both sure to assail my resolution. I had given Loring" (the name of his solicitor) "the heads of what my own conviction was grounded upon, before leaving England, and he had promised to be on the watch; but nothing turned up while I was afloat, as he let me know immediately on my first arrival here; and when I asked Alswitha that question, just before setting out for Sterling's, it was with no reference to any action of my own which her answer might influence, but simply to ascertain whether that young fellow's near neighbourhood were a fact of any importance to me and mine."

He paused, and we all three sat gloomily silent for some minutes; when Christine, as if struck by a sudden thought, exclaimed:—

"Then it must have been something about his brother, that took Hugh Wyndham so suddenly out of town yesterday!"

"Has he been sent for? Did he leave town yesterday?" asked my brother, almost inarticulate in his angry eagerness. "Then some damned spy has been at work, and I am baulked, and Owen Wyndham's over the water by this time!"

I now paid the penalty of my vengeful wishes of yore, as I saw the looks and heard the tones that expressed Godfrey's rage at being thus possibly "frustrate of his will!"

The prospect of his enemy's shame and banishment was not enough; he was

Not half sufficed, and greedy yet to kill!

Nor do I know to what excess of fury he might have been carried, had not a note been brought to him at that moment, on opening which a grim smile lighted up his

features, as he told us, with a strong effort at composure, "that matters were not as we had led him to fear, for Owen Wyndham was in custody."

Everything swam before my eyes as I took in this intelligence; and, for a time, I neither saw nor heard what passed around, absorbed as I was in the one thought, that my lack of self-command at Blendon was now causing the disgrace and misery of Hugh Wyndham and his whole family. When I recovered so much of the use of my senses as to become more aware of things going on in my presence, I heard Godfrey replying, as it seemed, to some representations of Christine's, by saying—

"No, no; it's impossible; I can't draw back now, if I would! Such steps have been taken, known to be taken, too, that a withdrawal on my part would just look like my having found myself, at the eleventh

hour, unprovided with that weight of evidence which could alone warrant my setting such a thing on foot at all. I should injure my own character, by seeming to have attempted, without grounds, to stain Wyndham's, and I *must* go on with what is begun.

"The fact is, Christine," added he, "that you can't enter into the duty or the feeling of the business; nor did I expect you should; Alswitha *would*—if it were not for—what it's no use discussing a second time—but the shedding of innocent blood cries out for retribution. That man first abused my father's hospitality, then murdered him; through him I have been kept—shall probably be kept life-long—out of my just inheritance, and through him I was exposed, in my wandering homeless youth, to such temptations as that it was only God's mercy saved me from becoming such another as himself!"

"But God *was* merciful to you," urged she.

"Yes, I was saved from sinking into the depths of vice. I am thankful for it, and I believe I was mainly spared in order to become, as at this day, an instrument of Heaven's justice on Owen Wyndham."

I felt, by the heaving of my breast, as he first recapitulated his wrongs, and then asserted his office of avenger, that he was right, and that I *should* have gone thoroughly along with him, but for—for that which had made me see justice and duty in a different light from what I should have undoubtedly seen them in, some years back. But this self-knowledge was not consolatory; it rather mingled an element of shame with my affliction; and sincere as was my gratitude to Christine, who drew near me in tenderness and sympathy as Godfrey left the room, still I felt that she had no power

of measuring the tortures caused by the conflicting forces even then battling within me. Her kind and simple nature saw nothing but the pain produced by the requirements of justice; and at the same time that she excused Godfrey—thought it needful too to excuse him to me!—her compassion for my unhappiness betrayed itself in expressions, some of which might have led one less acquainted with her principles than I was, into supposing her indifferent to the blackness of guilt, and insufficiently alive to the necessity of its punishment. She told me, with very needless contrition, that she had been surprized into letting Godfrey know on his arrival, what it had been settled *I* should tell him, owing to his having asked her, on entering, “whether young Wyndham were still next door?” and to his having observed something agitated in her look and tone as she answered.

"It does not matter, dearest Christine. Don't worry yourself," replied I. "As things are, it could not be of the slightest importance; but I wish I had not been bound by a promise to keep some things from you, and been restrained from telling others by—"

"By a most natural feeling," interrupted she, kindly, as I hesitated; "I can't blame you for that—can't blame you for the thing itself—now I know that poor Hugh Wyndham; though I confess I should have thought it strange, before I saw exactly the kind, frank, engaging creature he is; and to think how miserable he must be now! And his mother too—I wonder whether she knows it yet."

She stopped as she noticed the convulsive twitch, wherewith I suppose my countenance must have indicated how ill I could bear dilating on such a theme.

I thanked her by a gesture, and we embraced mutely, thus agreeing by tacit consent to abstain, for the present, from farther discussion in words of that terrible combination of circumstances which, while blighting my hopes and Hugh Wyndham's for ever, rendered me also a cause of bitter disappointment and smothered self-reproach to my brother.

CHAPTER XIII.

Raro antecedentem scelestum

Deseruit pede poena claudo.

HORACE.—*Carminum lib. iii., 2.*

It would be impossible for me to describe how the next few days were passed; the space does not remain as an actual blank in my memory, for I know it was a period of keen suffering, of doubt and suspense unutterable. I cannot detail what I did, what I or anyone else said during that time; I believe, however, that it was

during those days that the unhappy mother of Owen and of Hugh Wyndham was removed (in spite of illness) from the close neighbourhood of him who was unveiling the crimes of her eldest and best beloved son, to the house of one of her daughters; and I know it was then I acquired the knowledge of how Godfrey had obtained the information upon which he was proceeding to act.

To chronicle each link in that fatal chain of proofs with legal accuracy, would be too fearful a revival of the torture with which I learnt, bit by bit, how the lack of my evidence was to be supplied through that of other persons, to the seeking out and discovery of whom my recollections, stamped on my mind by undying hate, had afforded the original clue; but the following is as clear an account as I can now frame out of the communications made to me at the

time when I sought to know the shape and form of all I had to dread.

I have already mentioned that my brother had, before leaving England, given his lawyer a statement of his own impressions on the subject of his father's death, as well as the names of several persons who, if still living, might be able to furnish testimony as to the circumstances attending it; yet nothing had resulted from this during his absence, and I had been right in supposing that when he left us for Captain Sterling's, his hopes of one day bringing Owen Wyndham to justice were all but extinct.

It was not till he had been absent some days that he received, through Mrs. Smith of Blendon, the address of Jane Cole, formerly Hickman, whose long cessation of intercourse with her relation was now accounted for by its appearing that she had, for the last three years, lived abroad as nurse in the family of a

General Daubeny; but it proved, when Godfrey found time to pay her a visit, that her communications fell very far short of what he had looked for.

She was willing enough to talk of old times, and of the reminiscences which, tallying in all points with mine, fully established the fact that Owen Wyndham had, on the morning of that 12th of September, issued out of the library into the hall, and thence walked into my father's study, after which Jane, being called away from above stairs, saw him no more.

But, though these things were perfectly fresh in her memory, and were still dwelt on with deep indignation as proofs of *one* crime, it was plain that the thoughts of another had never crossed her mind, so that she no more doubted "poor master's having been murdered by that wicked fellow Richard Carter" than did her cousin, Mrs. Smith, and to disturb her faith on this point, would,

Godfrey felt, have been useless, perhaps dangerous.

All his former convictions were strengthened, it is true, by each and every circumstance Jane related, but he was especially disappointed at obtaining no tidings of her brother, whose disappearance on the day of the murder had laid strong hold on his imagination.

The sister, though speaking of him with reluctance, had told all she knew, which amounted to the bare fact that, though no member of the family had seen him since *that* day, he had at different times, and from different places, given them tokens of his existence ; that he had for some years resided in the Isle of Man, but had disappeared from thence, and that it was now so long since he had been heard of that they had every reason to suppose he was no longer with the living.

It had not been in Jane's power, either, to supply my brother with any information respecting the members of the Blendon Hall household, farther than that Nixon, the butler, was dead ; she had lost sight of all the rest ; and the sole result of an interview from which so much had been expected, was her promising Godfrey to send him the address of any such of her old fellow-servants as she might ever come across or hear of.

What pretext he used for requesting her to do so, I know not ; but he returned to Captain Sterling's thoroughly despairing of being ever enabled to become the instrument of Owen Wyndham's detection, and he was applying himself with renewed energy to assisting his friend's engineering operations, when a wonderful series of coincidences brought that to pass, which he had just persuaded himself to view as an impossibility.

It so happened that, among a crowd of labourers busied upon an embankment, of which Godfrey and his friend were watching the progress, there was a knot of Manxmen, who always herded together, and who, at this particular moment,—it was their dinner hour,—were talking so eagerly as to attract Captain Sterling's attention, and make him inquire what was exciting such interest.

It appeared that they were discussing a prisoner (lately taken up on suspicion of being concerned in a very remarkable railway robbery) whom some of these Manxmen had seen that morning at the next station, and had immediately recognised as one who had long been a sojourner in their native place, where, however, he bore a different name from that under which he had been arrested.

The circumstance of his having been a sojourner in the Isle of Man struck Godfrey.

He inquired the name by which this George Dawson had been there known, and, on learning that it was Hickman, Thomas Hickman, his resolution was instantly formed ; and as soon afterwards as he could do so without the suddenness of his departure creating observation, he left Captain Sterling's abode.

On quitting it, his first object was to satisfy himself whether this Hickman, alias Dawson, were indeed that Tom Hickman, of Blendon, with whom he had just despaired of ever meeting, and then to ascertain whether, should this supposition be found correct, his own rooted impression of Hickman's disappearance having some connection with Wyndham's deeds, would be shown to have been a mere delusion prompted by his wishes, or prove, on the contrary, to have been one of those sudden lights which break on the mind, mysteriously to ourselves,

revealing truths which the mere power of reason could never open to us.

To say when such a feeling is a revelation, would be presumptuous; but that we *are* visited by those glimpses of a knowledge beyond that with which we are habitually gifted, I am convinced. Such glimpses have visited me, and such a one was this guess of Godfrey's, to which his mind had sprung as I poured forth the full tide of my evil recollections at Blendon.

The prisoner Dawson *was* Tom Hickman; his disappearance *had* been brought about by dealings with Owen Wyndham; and the account of those dealings, given by him to my brother, was to the following effect:—

At the beginning of the autumn of 1835, Hickman was in debt and in difficulties, and in the habit of associating with persons who passed their nights in

poaching, and their days in lounging idleness.

Reckless from circumstances and from disposition, he grew more and more incautious in his proceedings; and, on the morning of that 12th of September, he had been daring enough to betake himself, in broad daylight, to a cover very near the "great house," to look after certain snares, in doing which he did not expect to be noticed or disturbed, because he had reasons of his own for being confident that no gamekeeper would come that way at that particular time, and because he also knew that "the squire" had made arrangements to be off early that morning, to join a shooting party ten miles off, at Beauchamp Park. His surprise was therefore great, when, about noon, he became suddenly aware that "the squire" was within five yards of him. He concealed himself hastily

among the bushes, meaning to make his escape when "the squire," who, as he observed, had no gun nor dogs with him, should have passed on. But he did not pass on; for, after walking along the narrow path close to where Tom lurked, he turned again, and continued to tread the same ground, going backwards and forwards with hurried steps, and looking, as Tom expressed it, "not like one in his right mind." How long this might have lasted, Tom could not say; but he presently discovered, first by a rustling among the neighbouring shrubs, and then by a glimpse of a man's figure moving stealthily onwards, that there was a third person in the copse, whom he presently recognised (when a sudden turn showed him his face) as that constant visitor at Blendon, whose motives for being so frequently there had long been the talk of the neighbouring ale-houses. The village scapegrace had wit

enough to guess, that the very same knowledge, of the very same "arrangements for the day," which had brought him (Tom Hickman) to set snares for birds in the home cover, had also lured the scapegrace of higher degree to run over from Leamington, where he then either was or pretended to be, to chase another kind of game at the Hall, and he inwardly determined that the handsome hunter should learn that he had been seen, and should pay him *something* at least as a reward for discretion.

Emboldened by this resolution to "turn a penny" if he could, and encouraged also by the perception that "the squire" was too full of his own affairs to be looking about him, Tom left his hiding-place, gliding away towards a path, which, though somewhat a winding one, led to a particular point in the park paling, whence report said that Owen

Wyndham had been more than once seen to issue.

He had hardly left the home cover, however, when he was startled by the sound of a shot, which, though not very loud, appeared to have been fired at no great distance, and he stopped to listen, fearing lest there should, after all, be a gamekeeper at hand; but he considered that his best course was to push quickly onward, till he reached the place of exit he was making for.

He waited outside; nor did he wait in vain, for he had rightly calculated what Wyndham's movements would be, and by what path he would endeavour to retreat.

He allowed him to clear the paling unchallenged; but the disguised gentleman had no sooner scrambled over the fence into the adjoining lane, than he was accosted by the countryman, who, saluting him with

mock respect by his name, inquired after the lady of Blendon, in a manner which showed him well informed of the scandals going on among his betters.

Tom was thrown a sovereign to quiet him at the moment, and within an hour after was summoned by a note, conveyed by a cottager's child of four or five years old, to meet Mr. Wyndham in a field not far distant.

He was informed at the rendezvous, "that it had been a near thing that he (Owen Wyndham) had not been caught on the Blendon premises" (where he tacitly implied that he had been trespassing in the fashion Hickman supposed); "that it was of great importance to 'the lady' that he should not be proved to have been in the neighbourhood; and that the best way to render such proof impossible, was for those who could afford what might be looked on as

testimony so to absent themselves as to avoid all risk of being cross-questioned and 'tempted' by the husband, whose suspicions, he feared, had been awakened."

These observations were followed up by the offer to Hickman of a considerable sum of money, conditionally upon his quitting his village immediately, and living in America, or in Australia, for some years to come.

Hickman had not a stainless reputation to lose, and was at that moment so "hard up" for two or three pounds, that he was soon persuaded to agree to the terms proposed, notwithstanding his dislike to leaving "his own people" without saying good bye, and to letting his disappearance be accounted for in Blendon, and the neighbourhood, in whatever way it pleased those who had prophesied ill of him "ever since he first went out at nights with Stephen Mills." But he considered that he should never get quit of

his poaching friends where he was; knew, moreover, that though he had hitherto escaped punishment through "the squire's" kindness, repeated offences would not be so easily overlooked, and had, besides, a vague notion that if he were once landed in a new country, with a good sum of money in his pocket, he would find it no trouble to be honest and industrious. He accepted the proffered bribe therefore, half of which was to be handed over to him at S——, a large town, some fifteen miles distant, and the other half to be remitted to him at New York. He then accompanied Wyndham in his walk "across country" to a place where the latter, having exchanged his peasant's dress for one suiting the character of a "commercial traveller" of a somewhat sporting turn, took Hickman with him in the dog-cart which was waiting, and drove with wonderful speed to S——, whence he had hired his vehicle, and

where he now obtained the promised money, by pawning a very valuable ring, which he took from off his little finger.

The business was not accomplished without some difficulty, for when the ring was first presented by Hickman, the pawnbroker hesitated at receiving a jewel of such price from the hands of one of his condition; and it was not till Wyndham himself appeared, declaring his messenger to be his own servant, that the cautious dealer consented to regard the article in question as really the property of a "gentleman in trouble," and advanced the sum required.

The money was placed in Hickman's hands; he started with it for the nearest seaport, and, before four-and-twenty hours were over, was on board a vessel bound for New York, where, according to agreement, he received the second part of his payment.

Up to that time, and for two or three

years after, Tom Hickman remained unconscious of having received the wages of connivance at any other sin than that to which Wyndham had, in a manner, pleaded guilty; and it was not till his return to England, poorer in purse and in character than when he left it, that his discovery of "the squire's" violent death, with its precise day and hour, brought some suspicions to his mind. These suspicions were strengthened by finding how liberal Wyndham was disposed to be to him, *provided only* that he kept away from Blendon and "his own people," who, it was represented, might ask questions, which his patron, "out of regard to the lady, who was now his wife," wished to have avoided.

A life of increased degradation had deadened Tom's scruples, though it had not so entirely hardened his heart but that his conscience pricked him severely for buying

assistance at the price of renouncing his family, in order to keep the guilty secrets of a man whom he more than half suspected of having murdered "the poor squire."

The pricks of conscience, as may be supposed under the circumstances, were unheeded, and he betook himself first to Jersey, and subsequently to the Isle of Man, from which places he wrote those meagre and unsatisfactory letters to one or two members of his family, which had just proved to them that he was alive, without relieving their anxiety on other points.

Evil habits had pursued him, however, and riotous living soon dissipated the money Wyndham had bestowed. He applied for more, and an annuity was procured for him; but this annuity his extravagance forced him to sell, much about the time that the discovery of certain smuggling practices placed him in such fear of the law as to

drive him from the island and oblige him to change his name.

He escaped to Belgium, got employment on a railway there, and being, for all his wild life, a sharp fellow, who could, when he saw cause, turn his wits to account, was noticed by the English engineer, who got him a situation where he was, and finally recommended him to one in England, which he had filled under the name of Dawson, till his intimacy with some men of worse than doubtful character, and some equivocal circumstances connected with the railway robbery above-mentioned, cast on him suspicion enough to warrant his arrest, notwithstanding his protestations of innocence, which, in spite of his indifferent reputation, he was afterwards so fortunate as to prove.

Such was, in brief, the account given to Godfrey in the prison at —.

His previous conviction was now become a moral certainty, but would it prove a "legal certainty?" That was the question, and he was sitting down, on returning to his inn, to communicate what he had heard to Mr. Loring, and ask his advice thereon, when he received a letter from Jane Cole—forwarded from Captain Sterling's—enclosing a strangely-worded epistle from old Mrs. Gill, who was residing, as the date showed, at Halifax, and who, apparently believing herself near her latter end, thought it her duty to express contrition for undeserved reproofs cast upon her to whom it was addressed, "because *she* always spoke out the truth, while others did not do the same."

The letter was interlarded with many texts—not always very applicable to the subject—and there were also in it allusions to a "good Mr. Benson," who seemed to

.

be her spiritual director, and by whose advice she seemed to be writing.

Whether this letter were simply an act of humiliation, an outward sign of penitence for harsh speeches in general, or whether it betokened any particular cause of self-reproach for helping to conceal what, according to my recollections, she had been previously very ready to pry into, was a point my brother could not determine; but as soon as he had finished his own letter, he set off for Halifax, at which place he appointed Mr. Loring to meet him.

It was not an easy task to make Mrs. Gill as communicative as Tom Hickman had been. *He* was conscious of many openly blameworthy acts, and, though steadily asserting his freedom from the crime he now stood charged with, was sufficiently alive to the disgrace of his ill-spent life, not only to feel bowed down

•

with shame as he reviewed its tenor, but to deem it a relief, perhaps a sort of expiation, to confess all he knew to the only son and representative of "the squire," whose manifold kindnesses to him and his he still recollected so gratefully, as to show that his sister was right, when she said that, "in spite of his faults, there *was* good in poor Tom !"

For Mrs. Gill, on the contrary, it was a hard matter to admit her backslidings; and though in a recent illness she had allowed to Mr. Benson, a dissenting minister whose preaching she followed, "that her mind was much disturbed by the part she had formerly played when housekeeper in a wealthy family," she would not at first impart anything to Godfrey. Mr. Benson, however, when applied to by him and Mr. Loring together, exerted his influence so successfully as to obtain a recital in full,

which he himself took down in writing, of all Mrs. Gill had seen and known, bearing upon the events they were now endeavouring to investigate.

In substance it amounted to this:—

Gill had, even as I supposed, sought to open her master's eyes; he disbelieved her at first, but presently became more watchful; and on the morning of the 12th of September, a something—she had never learnt what—so excited his suspicions that he altered his intention of going to shoot at Beauchamp Park, stayed at home, and had, as she (Gill) plainly perceived, a very stormy discussion with his wife, whose little writing-case (the same I recollected) was in his hands when she met him crossing the hall. She never saw him again alive; but in the afternoon, after the first horror and confusion attending my father's death had somewhat subsided, she was sent for to the library, where she found her

mistress, "with only the child" (myself) fast asleep on the sofa. It was plain, Gill said, that Mrs. Lee well knew by whom her husband's suspicions had been awakened, for she then and there began endeavouring to convince her of her "mistakes on the subject," and when arguments failed, had recourse to gifts, and to promises of still more liberal donations in future, if she would unite with her "in defending her reputation" against those who might attack it. To these offers Mrs. Gill had, by her own confession, yielded, and she became, from that moment, the vindicator of her mistress's fame in public, and in private her confidant and steady ally. Through her, sums of money were more than once transmitted to Wyndham; through her his letters reached her mistress, and by her means whispers in the servants' hall were hushed, and reports nipped in the bud. The person whose tongue she had most difficulty in checking

was Jane Hickman, who, on her return from her mother's cottage, to which she had been called away on the afternoon of the 12th, and where she had been detained by a bad sore throat till after the inquest and funeral were over, declared to Wilkins that she could not stay longer in a place where "there was such goings on," adding, when angrily pressed for an explanation, that "she knew people sometimes said very wicked things, but, after what she had seen with her own eyes on the morning of poor master's death, she could not help believing them."

Wilkins, being an honest believer in her lady's innocence, and unwilling, besides, to be troubled with the training of a new nursery maid, complained to Gill, who, convinced, as was her mistress, that it was better to retain in the house one possessed of such inconvenient knowledge, than to let her go elsewhere, spared

no pains to prevent her from giving warning. She urged on her the duty of gratitude to her late master, touched on the "great difference" made by Wilkins and by her mistress between Miss Emmeline and Miss Alswitha, as motives for remaining; and, when she saw that these were likely to prevail, added a pretty sharp admonition to refrain from speaking of things in which her eyes had surely deceived her.

In this part of her narrative, Mrs. Gill appeared anxious to explain, that she did not *then* know of her own certain knowledge, that Mr. Wyndham *had* been within the house on that particular morning, for she thought Jane Hickman might have been mistaken, till a peculiar incident satisfied her of the contrary.

Her mistress had been in the daily habit of wearing a very remarkable ring of great value—a transparent-set ruby of un-

common shape, adorned with little clusters of brilliants. This ring had been on her finger on the morning of the 12th; in the evening it was nowhere to be seen. Wilkins, who assisted her in undressing, was the person to notice the circumstance to her mistress, who observed carelessly, that she must have taken it off below stairs, and that it would be probably found next morning. It was *not* found, however, and Wilkins mentioned it as a proof of "how her poor lady felt her great loss," that she had hardly even inquired about this precious ring. Its disappearance was, notwithstanding, an annoyance to her household, and many were the conjectures formed as to how it could have vanished, when one morning, about a week before the family left Blendon, Gill was desired to tell her fellow-servants that the lost ring had been found in a little drawer in the

library, into which Mrs. Lee must have dropped it, while putting aside some trifle before retiring to her room, on the night of the 12th. But Gill knew that it had not been so found; for she had, the day before, received a mysterious packet directed to herself, but meant for her mistress, wherein was a very small case, which she had had the curiosity to open, and which contained the ruby ring! For what purpose it had been placed in Mr. Wyndham's hands she could not tell; but the manner of its return proved that he *had* been in the house, and *had* had an interview with her mistress on the day of its disappearance.

The circumstance made no difference in Gill's plans, and she took no notice of it to her mistress, but it made her even more aware than before of the necessity of not letting Jane leave the family at present. She, accord-

ingly, used every endeavour to retain her; and, leaving off the rebukes she had lately indulged in, exerted herself to smooth all difficulties, both with the girl and her mother, in the matter of going abroad.

Nor did her services end there; for it was through her that the correspondence between her mistress and Mr. Wyndham was afterwards carried on, up to the time when the expiration of the year of widowhood rendered further concealment unnecessary.

The written statement contained many other details, tending to show that, "though she had accepted gifts for the hiding of past guilt, &c., &c., she had not connived at any present sin;" besides a formal declaration that whatever might hereafter be proved against Mr. Wyndham, his worst crime had been totally unsuspected by her. She was also, it must be owned, anxious to assert the same of her mistress,

and to maintain that her peremptory decree (which had been so implicitly obeyed), forbidding "all discussion of their father's death, and the manner of it," in presence of the children, was really to be attributed to her dread of the effect it might have on their nerves, and not to a guilty cognisance of the dreadful truth.

But these qualifications did not prevent Gill's narrative (each word of which she declared herself ready to confirm upon oath) from supplying almost every point of evidence needed to connect Jane Cole's account with that of her brother. It established two things: first, the seizure of the writing-case, which showed that all was discovered; and secondly, that a private interview had taken place between the pair, in which Wyndham must have been made aware of

his detection—a fact proved by the silent testimony of the ring, which had been doubtless proffered by its unhappy owner to provide the means of flight. Wyndham knew, therefore, that he was detected; and it was highly probable that he also knew that Philip Lee's wife, if she became a widow *that* day, would be a wealthy one.

The motive for the crime, in the breast of a man so depraved and so desperate, was thus plainly supplied; the events that followed appeared to rest on proofs as strong as any that come under the class of circumstantial; the eye-witness alone was wanting. The pawnbroker at S——, who had advanced money upon the ring, proved to be still alive, and it was farther discovered that he had been so struck by the beauty, peculiarity, and value of the gems offered him, as to have made a note of the circumstances

under which they had been presented, in case of their having been obtained in some irregular manner. He had, also, a distinct remembrance of the ring's being shortly redeemed by the same gentleman who had asserted it to be his. It seemed probable that more evidence would be able to be obtained; and it appeared, therefore, in the eyes of Mr. Loring, and of other persons "learned in the law" who were consulted, that there were, as the phrase is, "good hopes of bringing the affair to a successful issue."

A successful issue! Yes—for assuredly, even if Godfrey failed of making Owen Wyndham pay with his life for the life he had taken, still the moral evidence of his guilt was such that, even if uncondemned for want of absolute legal proof, he was certain to be thenceforth banished the society of his equals, as one whom mere

chance and luck had saved from just punishment at the hangman's hands.

In one way or another Godfrey would obtain his revenge; and I mine—as my penalty for having desired it!

CHAPTER XIV.

LITTLE or no conversation passed between Godfrey and me during the period immediately succeeding his return; for even the result of his investigations, and the written papers on which some of them were drawn up, were chiefly conveyed to me—if I mistake not—through Christine. But I could see that he frequently looked towards me, his eyes wearing an expression of painful watchfulness as he glanced my way; and, though unshaken in his purpose,

he was evidently so much grieved by the manner in which his present undertaking affected me, that I think he felt it a relief to be almost all day out of the house, on business more or less connected with the approaching prosecution. He was, however, one morning at home, writing letters in the front drawing-room, while I sat listlessly in the window-seat of the small apartment at the back, when my attention was attracted by his rising suddenly from his employment as the door nearest him opened; and before I could well turn my head to see whose entrance had disturbed him, I heard Hugh Wyndham's voice presuming "that he had the honour of addressing Captain Lee."

I felt so paralysed that I did not attempt to rise, but sat looking at the two like one turned to stone, while my brother answered the query with a stiff bow, and

then proceeded to inquire "to what he owed the favour of Captain Wyndham's visit?"

"My visit in this house is to Miss Lee—to your sister," replied Hugh, calmly. "I was told she was at home, and I see," he continued, with a slight bend of his head as he looked towards me, "that I was told the truth."

"My sister is free to receive whatever visits she thinks proper," returned Godfrey with a composure of which I saw the effort; "but I should have thought," he proceeded, "that she would do better to avoid what must be, to say the least, so painful an interview. Will you not rather receive in writing, Alswitha, any such communications as may be needful?"

I had by this time risen; but the unexpected appearance of Hugh Wyndham, coming thus inauspiciously into contact

with my brother, had so bewildered my faculties that I knew not what to say, scarcely what to wish, and I made no reply.

Hugh however advanced some steps farther into the room, telling Godfrey "that he had no intention of intruding himself on Miss Lee, but was the bearer of a message from her mother, which he had promised to convey, and which," he continued, looking at me, though still addressing my brother, "I can only be deterred from delivering in person by your sister's own expressed desire to the contrary."

"She knows what my advice to her would be," observed Godfrey.

"I believe I do, brother," said I, gathering courage as I felt the necessity of exerting it, "but I am resolved to hear whatever Hugh Wyndham is come to say; if you think me wrong, I can't help it."

"Nor can *I* help your doing as you choose, so shall waste no words on the subject," said Godfrey, with bitterness. "But you may remember—"

"Brother," interrupted I, "we all now know each other's history; nothing secret is to be discussed, and I have not the least objection to your hearing every word that is likely to pass."

"I have little curiosity on that point," answered he, haughtily; "it was for your own sake I could have wished you had retired, as I am now going to do."

Thus speaking, he bowed slightly to Hugh (who had stood motionless during this debate) and turned away from us, but not by any means to leave the apartment, for he simply withdrew to the end of the smaller drawing-room, where he placed himself on the window-seat I had been occupying, while I sat down at the opposite extremity of the

front room, and waited for Hugh Wyndham to draw near.

"I conclude," said he, when he had seated himself beside me, "that you know where my brother is, and of what he is accused."

"I do," replied I, "for I was told all the day after I last saw you."

"Then," said he, "I need lose no time in explanations; your mother bid me ask you to read this in my presence, and to return an answer, by word of mouth, through me."

He gave me a letter as he spoke; it contained what follows:—

"It is to the hands of him who loves you, and whom you love, that I commit this appeal to your justice, and it is on him I rely for unveiling the iniquity of the horrible conspiracy now set on foot against my husband's life and my honour. Hugh's influence may perhaps avail to correct the false statements which have, I

doubt not, poisoned your mind; and his advice will strengthen you to brave the anger of those you live among, by daring to cast aside your former prejudices, and by proclaiming the truth, which may save us all. False witnesses have been suborned to declare that Mr. Wyndham was in the house at Blendon on that fatal 12th of September, that he had then an interview with me, and only left my presence to seek the means of perpetrating the deed of which he stands accused. You were then little more than five years old, but, as you *never left me* that morning—and there are those who can prove you were too observant and intelligent of your age to be deceived—*your* testimony will destroy theirs who assert the occurrence of an interview which, as you well know, never took place. It is perhaps fortunate that the malice of our enemies should have devised this fable, for you can, if you will, contradict

it, and when contradicted the evidence connected with it falls to the ground. In asking you to do this, I only ask for justice ; and yet I—your mother—must plead for it as for a favour—must remind you that if my happiness is destroyed, yours must be shipwrecked also ! Hugh loves you—you know not how dearly ; but should you allow the hateful belief that has been instilled into you so to prevail over justice and humanity as to forbid your attempting to save his brother, he will—he *must*—tear you from his heart. He loves you ; and the union which has been so long the object of my daily prayers may yet be accomplished ; but he dare not, as he values his mother's blessing, take for his wife the woman who refuses to spare him and his the blight sought to be cast on them. Have pity, dearest child—for dear you are in spite of everything—have pity upon yourself as well as upon me, and let

me learn from Hugh's lips, that your heart is moved towards her who is still your loving, though afflicted,

“MOTHER.”

I saw at once what was expected of me—comprehended the bribe of happiness held out (to be forfeited if I refused to pay its price)—perceived also that it was Hugh's belief in his brother's innocence (of *this* crime at least) which had brought him to claim my performance of the “act of justice” required of me, and I sat with the open letter on my knees, panting for breath, and vainly seeking for the least hard and injurious words in which I could make known to him the impossibility of my doing so.

“Are you hesitating, Alswitha?” asked Hugh at last.

“Do you know,” inquired I, “what the object of this letter is?”

“To make known the truth and refute false accusations. I did not believe your hatred would be strong enough to withhold you from *that* !” replied Hugh, reproachfully.

“Make known the truth !—trust me, it is better I should be silent.”

“Better be silent when your words would—I don’t understand you, Alswitha.”

“My mother will,” replied I.

He started, turned as pale as death, and then asked, with so hurried an utterance as hardly allowed him to be intelligible, “if I meant that Owen *was* in the house ?”

I bowed my head assentingly, and he barely stammered out the question, “whether I had seen him with my own eyes ?”

“With my own eyes ; and even therefore,” continued I, without trusting myself to look at him, “the silence you may depend on, is what will best avail.”

He rose from his seat, and began rest-

lessly pacing to and fro between the door and window, alternately ejaculating complaints of having been deceived, and addressing questions to me, which showed he could scarcely even yet admit to himself the dreadful fact of his brother's crime.

"But she must *think* you can bear favourable testimony, or she wouldn't ask you! She must know you saw him, if you did! Is it not possible *you* might be mistaken?"

I shook my head mournfully, for I understood too well that my mother, though aware of what my probable recollections might be, had taken the chance of my being persuaded to give a false account of them. Hugh, I suppose, came gradually to a comprehension of her motives, for after some moments' silence he drew near me, and said, in a tone of great bitterness:—

"If I had been aware of this, I would

never have brought her message! And yet," he added, in a gentler voice, "I suppose that if I had not, I should never have seen you again, Alswitha!—for now—"

"There is a barrier between us," interrupted I, as he hesitated; "a barrier I could not make you see before, but which *I* beheld too plainly!"

"If I had only known of these recollections of yours!" cried he.

"I hoped, in my madness," returned I, "that I might never need to impart them to you; for I knew not on what work Godfrey was gone, and I persuaded myself that in becoming yours, I might lessen the chance of his ever attempting—"

"My dear Alswitha, you would fain have saved us all. I see it, and I thank you, as well as a shamed and hopeless man can thank. But my ignorance has been fatal to my wretched brother. Un-

pleasant rumours had reached your uncle Haworth, I know not through what channel; but he brought tidings of them to Bampton Chase, and wanted Owen to contradict this, and to inquire into that, when he ought to have been hastening over the water, as he would have done, I doubt not, had he guessed what was actually threatening; but hearing only of rumours, and fancying besides that a certain Hickman was dead, who turns out to be alive, he was induced, through what Haworth said about 'not flying before the breath of calumny,' to remain where he was. Your mother then grew frightened, and sent for me, saying, as soon as I arrived at Bampton Chase, 'that such unjust sentences were sometimes passed both in the courts and in the world, that she should be happier if Owen put himself in safety.' But in evil hour, and in my certainty that he was free from *that* guilt,

whatever other sins might be laid to his charge, I adopted your uncle's view, that flight would be ruinous to his reputation, while he, not suspecting that anything so serious as a trial was really at hand, could hardly express to us his fears of it. At all events, he either gave up the notion of flight or delayed it; and the morning after my going down there he was seized. I learnt presently, from more quarters than one, that there was evidence which, it was supposed, would bear hard on him; but, so long as I relied on his asseverations, and your mother's, that he was not in Blendon Hall that day, I clung to my belief of his freedom from blood-guiltiness. Had I known the truth in time, we should have been shamed enough, but my mother would not have had to count a publicly executed felon among her sons!"

though momentary shudder well
 ed his frame as he concluded,
 ed himself to endure that from
 uld not escape, and said, after
 nts' pause, in a comparatively
 :—

“Nancy I am reproaching you,
 Alswitha, dearest! You hoped for the best
 —you were not in your brother’s confidence
 —and I urged you to make, as I thought,
 both yourself and me happy. But is it
 possible that you had *always* known me for
 the brother of—what I cannot now doubt of
 Owen’s being?”

“Not always — no — for, though I already
 knew too much, I *then* believed my father’s
 death to have been self-inflicted. It was not
 till after leaving my mother’s house, when I
 went with my brother to visit our old home
 in the absence of its occupants, that I was
 undeceived on that point, and that my recol-

lections of that evil day, rushing on me with irresistible force as I stood in the self-same room, in the self-same spot, where I had heard my mother implore your brother to take her away with him, burst involuntarily from my lips. My disjointed words were fatal revelations; for they furnished the key to the knowledge and the proof that has been obtained elsewhere."

"By Heaven, Alswitha," cried he, "that picture was a kind of omen, and you *have* been my evil fate!"

"I have been my own," murmured I, despairingly.

"What have I said?" exclaimed he, with a look of sudden remorse. "As if you had not suffered enough—as if you had not shown kindness unspeakable in keeping up—in renewing friendship with one of Owen's blood! Yet you did so; and I now ask myself how it was in your power?"

"You had been my one friend, and I could not help loving you," answered I.

A flash of joy sparkled just perceptibly in his eye, but it had already faded as he said, mournfully :—

"How happy I might have been! But oh! dear Alswitha, it was in ill hour for you and me both, that heeding a rash promise and a vengeful command, you shunned what must have so linked your lot to mine these seven years past, that no crime of *my* brother's or revenge of yours could part us."

"An ill hour, indeed," repeated I; "an hour I must rue life-long; but the past is irrevocable."

"It is," said he, moodily; but, as he gazed earnestly on my tearful countenance, it may be that he read therein the full depth of the remorseful grief with which his words had pierced me, for he added,

breathlessly, "The past is past, but the future,—must it be barred us because I have now but a blighted name to offer? *Must* the innocent suffer for the guilty?" cried he, snatching my hand, "and must we forego—"

But he was interrupted by Godfrey's coming forward from the back room, and I drew my hand out of Hugh's as my brother stepped between us, saying in a calm but decided tone:—

"Mrs. Wyndham's message has, I presume, been given and replied to; there is no advantage in prolonging what is painful."

"I agree with you," returned Hugh; "the question only is," he continued, addressing me, "whether—whether—our own prospects—"

"Your own prospects!" repeated Godfrey, sternly eyeing us both, "while it

hangs in uncertainty whether *your* brother is to be esteemed by his countrymen a false accuser, or *yours* a murderer, is it a place or time to think of securing such?"

"You are doing what you look on as your duty, I doubt not," observed Hugh, reddening.

"I am," replied my brother, "and I make equally sure that you have come here to-day in the belief of doing yours, by those you consider to have a claim on you. You have fulfilled it; and such being the case, Owen's Wyndham's brother and my sister can have no more to say to each other under my roof."

"Is that so, Alswitha?" asked Hugh.

"You see it must be," replied I, for I dreaded to exasperate Godfrey in Hugh's presence.

"God guard you, then!" cried he. "There will be wrath and bitterness on more sides

than one to hinder our meeting henceforth! Yet, if I am living a year hence, you will hear from me."

So saying, he took my hand once more, pressing it hard a moment, and departed, after exchanging at the door a slight inclination of the head with my brother, who, as he disappeared, asked eagerly :—

"What my mother had required of me?"

"False witness," said I, "and it was my doom to make it plain to her messenger that it *was* false witness she desired."

"And did *he* not urge the same?"

"No, Godfrey, not one moment."

"Then it's a pity he is a Wyndham; and it's worse pity, Alswitha," added he, as he kissed my brow, while I stood motionless, "that your hand is as hot as fire, and that your temples throb as if an anvil were beating within."

I could not hate one whose sympathy I

felt to be so deep, in spite of his passions and prejudices, and I stretched my arms to clasp his neck; but the effort was beyond my powers, and I lost consciousness even while he returned my embrace; nor did I fully regain it till—some weeks later—I wakened from a disturbed sleep to find myself in bed in a darkened room, Christine seated beside me, and gazing at me with anxious tenderness.

CHAPTER XV.

Great Nemesis!

* * * * *

Thou who didst call the Furies from th' abyss,
 And round Orestes bad'st them howl and hiss
 For that unnat'ral retribution, just
 Had it but been from hands less near!

FOURTH CANTO OF "CHILDE HAROLD."

SOMETHING I cannot well describe convinced me that a considerable period of time must have elapsed since the events I was last conscious of; and the first words I had strength to utter were:—

"Has the trial come on yet? What is become of Owen Wyndham?"

"Owen Wyndham is no more," replied Christine; "he felt, it would seem, that the trial, when it took place, could have but one result, and he procured, even in his prison, the means of self-destruction."

"And my mother, what of her?"

"She has been ill, ill much as you have been; but is now better, as I hear from Mrs. Wroughton," replied Christine.

There was yet another person about whom I wished to inquire, but could not bring myself to ask, and I lay silent, till Christine, guessing my thoughts, answered them by telling me "that Hugh Wyndham was still in England, but was to leave it in a few days, to join his regiment."

"Then he does not mean to live with his mother?"

"No," said Christine, "he does not. But now, dear Alswitha, that I have told you what it might be more hurtful for you to remain

in suspense about than to know, you must not ask any more questions, for to speak of these things might bring on a relapse."

My weakness was too great for me to disobey; and I began to understand, upon reflection, that the illness which had thus prostrated me had probably been a brain fever, a conclusion which I afterwards found to have been correct.

When my state rendered me fitter to bear it, I gradually learnt from Christine, what *she* had learnt through Mrs. Wroughton, namely, that Hugh's determined refusal to renounce his engagement to me, had so embittered his mother, and, indeed, his whole family, that, in spite of the painfulness of returning among his brother officers after what had occurred, he preferred it, he said, to the plans which had been proposed for him if he gave up his profession.

"It was fortunate," he added, "that he

had seen this in time, for he had once been on the very point of sending in his papers."

He had now left England, Christine said; "but," proceeded she, "I was able, before he went, to let him know, also through Mrs. Wroughton, that you were out of danger."

"I am thankful for that," answered I, "though I am sure I shall never see him again."

"How can you be *sure*?" asked my kind encourager; and I tried, out of gratitude to her, to seem to believe that possible which I knew was not so.

In process of time I recovered my strength, and we returned to Tynteford. Godfrey, as well as Christine, was all kindness and consideration for me; his solicitude was chiefly shown in the numberless things he refrained from saying and doing, lest they should give me pain; hers in her

ceaseless endeavours to bring me to believe that there might yet be in store for me some of that happiness of which I declared myself unworthy, and felt myself well nigh incapable.

My mother had, I knew, never recovered from the blow dealt her by her husband's tragical end and the exposure of her own disgrace ; for, without falling a prey to any actual delusion, she had sunk into a state of melancholy torpor, which virtually precluded her from the active use of her mental faculties ; and I was haunted night and day by the consciousness that I had been—though unintentionally, not the less certainly—instrumental in bringing upon her this doom of aggravated misery and desolation, which I had no power to avert or even to alleviate.

Yet, notwithstanding that burden of self-reproach which I was never able to cast aside, I cannot deny that there were moments when

I was visited by gleams of hope that the next autumn would find Hugh Wyndham not only living, but still desirous—spite my fate and my sins—of binding his lot with mine.

Meantime, the rumours of war which had begun to trouble Europe, changed into something like its reality, and the anxieties attending it were added to all others.

Godfrey was soon appointed to a ship which sailed immediately for the Baltic; Hugh's regiment joined the rest of the troops at Varna, where he escaped disease, and I speculated, like many others, on the possibility of our troops returning without a blow being struck; but it was ordered otherwise, and with the details of the battle of the Alma, came the news of his death.

Since that hour it has been my attempt—

* * * * *

Postscript by Mrs. Wroughton.

All that remains of my dear pupil's

history is soon told; for, in spite of her rooted impression that "the existence of a Lee might be blighted indeed, but not shortened by sorrow," her life was not prolonged many months beyond her twenty-sixth birthday. She had so fully made up her mind to view her union with Hugh Wyndham as an event against which destiny had set a bar, that his death seemed to affect her less as a loss to herself, than as an additional misfortune for which she was answerable.

It was in vain that her sister-in-law strove to convince her that she ought not to say "his blood was on her head." "No," she always replied to Mrs. Lee's kind representations, "it is useless to tell me that, for he would be living, and in England now, had *I* not been a subject of strife between him and his family."

The tearless and rigid grief which

preyed upon her had not yet in any degree relaxed its hold, when her brother's return from sea, in the following summer, gave still farther trials to her powers of endurance; for his presence sharpened her sorrows, though she never ceased assuring me "that her love and esteem for him continued unabated, albeit the sight of his painful anxiety when in her company oppressed her, and disposed her to think both he and she would be less unhappy at a distance from each other."

She would not, however, risk hurting him by proposing to quit Tynteford; but when her mother's death, which occurred some months afterwards, put Captain Lee in immediate possession of Blendon Hall, his sister then made known her inability to return with him to that home of her childhood, which she had, so fatally for herself and others, once revisited. He made no oppo-

sition to her living thenceforth alone, and they parted mournfully though affectionately, agreeing to meet every autumn at some sea-bathing place, so as to let no year pass without a renewal of intercourse, unclouded by the present remembrances of Blendon, in which place the brother and his family established themselves, while the sister sought a new home in one of the southern counties.

At this home of hers I was a frequent, indeed almost the only visitor; but I could afford little consolation; for certainly if ever inward torment, stopping short of affecting the keenness and strength of the understanding, incapacitated a mortal from tasting of repose, that mortal was Alswitha Lee.

"I am pursued by the Furies," she would often say, "and it is just judgment; for have I not proved a very destroyer?—bringing evil on those I have loved, even as on

those I have hated? My mother was not Godfrey's mother; her spirit does not beset *him*. *He* broke no bond of nature in striking the blow that felled her to the earth; but it was I—her daughter—who put the rod into his hands. Do I deserve to be ever freed from the stings of conscience that pierce me?"

I tried to encourage her with the hope that time and the mercy of Heaven would one day restore peace to her; but she shook her head, saying:—

"Not in this world; no, never; for it is not mere grief that consumes my soul! When it has pleased God to release *that*, then I trust it may know rest."

There was not one among her old pursuits which now seemed to divert her mind, or even to soothe it; but, as the wasting operation of that unrelenting self-reproach which devoured her, exhausted her bodily

strength, and confined her more and more to the house, she began to spend a good deal of time in writing; and it must have been then, I conclude, that she commenced that chronicle of personal recollections, which, though unfinished, was so nearly brought up to its close.

If her history was a singular one, her character was no less so; and a despairing bitterness was added to her affliction, by the knowledge, that among those who sorrowed most for him she had loved, none could sorrow *with* her.

“Alswitha Lee may well feel remorse, since it is to her, and to her fiendish passions, that I owe the death of my eldest and of my youngest son.”

Such was the speech, repeated by some over-busy person, as having fallen from the lips of old Mrs. Wyndham, who still survived those she had idolized.

I could never think Mrs. Wyndham herself free from blame; but the bereaved mother's complaint struck at my pupil's heart like the stab of a poisoned dagger, adding venom to the incurable wounds already rankling there, and aggravating the weakness which disabled her from struggling with bodily ills, of whatever nature.

The projected meeting with her brother at the sea-side never took place; for, before the next summer's leaves had strewed this earth, Alswitha's troubled mind had so worn its fleshly mould, as to put any journey, however short, out of the question.

It could be no surprise to me therefore, when I was informed, later in autumn, by a letter from her maid, that an accidental, and apparently slight indisposition, which had attacked her, was now assum-

ing a very different character, or to find on my arrival that the gradual decay of her naturally strong constitution, rendered recovery hopeless. Still, her release was not speedy; nor did that sorely wearied spirit find even the semblance of rest, till within a few days of its departure, when some foretaste of the peace she longed for, seemed granted to her prayers.

Yet it was only on my representations that her brother was sent for; and she yielded to my request "rather," as she said, "to spare *him* the pain which her shunning a farewell might cause him, than from any comfort she looked to herself in once more beholding him she had long worshipped — him she still loved beyond all living!"

I think, nevertheless, that there *was* a melancholy satisfaction to both in that last sad—almost silent—meeting. She

died with her hand in his; and when Captain Lee had forced himself into comparative composure after the shock of perceiving that his sister no longer breathed, he said in a smothered tone:—

“It would be cruelty to wish her revived, for her existence was a living death! I have bought justice and my inheritance very dear!”

On the day of the funeral he seemed to me to have grown ten years older. I have not seen him since; and I am told that he is now absent on a distant voyage.

THE END.

13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

MESSRS. HURST AND BLACKETT,

SUCCESSORS TO MR. COLBURN,

HAVE JUST PUBLISHED THE FOLLOWING NEW WORKS.

MEMOIRS OF THE COURT OF GEORGE IV.

From Original Family Documents. By the DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM, K.G. 2 vols., 8vo., with Portraits.

"The country is very much indebted to the Duke of Buckingham for the publication of these volumes, to our thinking the most valuable of the contributions to recent history which he has yet compiled from his family papers.—*John Bull*.

SIXTEEN YEAR'S OF AN ARTIST'S LIFE IN MOROCCO, SPAIN, AND THE CANARY ISLANDS.

By Mrs. ELIZABETH MURRAY. 2 vols., coloured illustrations.

"Mrs. Murray's book is like her painting, luminous, rich, and fresh. We welcome it (as the public will also do) with sincere pleasure. It is a hearty book, written by a clever, quick-sighted and thoughtful woman."—*Athenæum*.

SIX YEARS IN RUSSIA. By AN ENGLISH

LADY. 2 vols., 21s.

THE JEWS IN THE EAST. By the Rev. P.

BEATON, M.A. From the German of Dr. FRANKL. 2 vols., 21s.

"Those persons who are curious in matters connected with Jerusalem and its inhabitants, are strongly recommended to read this work, which contains more information than is to be found in a dozen of the usual books of travel."—*Times*.

HENRY III. KING OF FRANCE, HIS COURT

AND TIMES. From numerous unpublished sources. By MISS FREER, Author of "The Life of Marguerite d'Angoulême,"

"Elizabeth de Valois," &c. 3 vols. with fine portraits. 31s. 6d.

EPISODES OF FRENCH HISTORY DURING

THE CONSULATE & FIRST EMPIRE. By Miss PARDON. 2 v.

A SUMMER AND WINTER IN THE TWO

SICILIES. By JULIA KAVANAGH. 2 vols. Illustrations, 21s.

LODGE'S PEERAGE AND BARONETAGE FOR

1859, under the Especial Patronage of HER MAJESTY AND H.R.H. THE PRINCE CONSORT, and corrected throughout by the Nobility. 28th Edition, 1 vol., royal 8vo., with the arms beautifully engraved, handsomely bound, with gilt edges, price 31s. 6d.

HURST AND BLACKETT'S STANDARD LIB-

RARY OF CHEAP EDITIONS OF POPULAR MODERN

WORKS. Now in course of publication on the 1st of every alternate month, each work complete in 1 vol., price 5s., elegantly printed, bound, and illustrated.

Volumes already published.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. SAM SLICK'S NATURE AND HUMAN NATURE. | 4. NATHALIE. By JULIA KAVANAGH. |
| 2. JOHN HALIFAX GENTLEMAN. | 5. A WOMAN'S THOUGHTS ABOUT WOMEN. By the Author of "JOHN HALIFAX GENTLEMAN." |
| 3. THE CRESCENT AND THE CROSS. By ELIJAH WARBURTON. | |





